



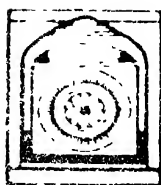








# PREFACE TO AMBEDKARISM



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# PREFACE TO AMBEDKARISM



R. C. Prasad

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*For*  
*Padma Bhushan Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak*  
*Who Incarnates Ambedkarism*



## *Preface*

The man who made social democracy the basic theme of his epochal writings and speeches was a prime example of socio-political militancy. His worshippers extolled him as 'a dedicated crusader' and 'a Messiah for the untouchables of India'; he was glorified as the architect of our Constitution, a great personality, and one of the greatest nation-builders, and vilified as an apostate śūdra, unscrupulous, inhuman, and unprincipled, a renegade who never hesitated to back the British and betray his own country. To most of the world, the man who influenced the destinies of around 200 million humans and exercised more power than any other intellectual in contemporary Indian history was, in Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's phrase "a man with a mission of liberation of man, a single soul thunderbolt which struck at the roots of human bondage..."

He was born at Mhow cantonment, near Indore in Central India (now in Madhya Pradesh) on April 14, 1891 into a nondescript Mahar family of impecunious untouchables; his name was Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar\*. His early childhood was spent in the circle of dalits, panchamas and pariahs around his father, Ramji Maloji Sakpal, significantly a subedar-major in the army. His mother, Bheema Bai, came of a comparatively well-to-do family of Murhad, a village in the Thane (then Thana) district of the then Bombay Presidency. She hoped that Bhim, her fourteenth child, would be a great man 'like his father'. Bhim obediently prepared himself for this greatness in spite of two handicaps: the bitter stings of impoverishment and the tyrannies which every untouchable had to endure under caste-Hindu domination. "The social milieu," reviews Justice

\*His surname 'Ambavadekar' was changed into 'Ambedkar' in school records by one of his teachers who bore this surname.

Iyer in his inimitably forceful style, “shot with iniquities suffered by the community into which he was born, is a setting which throws light on the story of Babasaheb and of the crushing realism which ignited his incendiary radicalism. The four-fold ‘varnas’, as a system, prevailed from the early memory of human history in the land of Hindustan. Chaturvarnya, whatever its rationale, flexibility, mobility and finer genius, if any, became a besetting vice, and a source of die-hard inhibition, savage exploitation, apartheidisation, vocational discrimination, social suppression, and cultural corruption. But even beneath the *Shudra* at the bottom came an outcaste class, the *panchama*, *antyaja* or *pariah*. They were the lowest in the Hindu system but had numerous subdivisions and graded inter se inequalities. This vivisection weakened the potential and pre-empted the prospect of united action for challenging their sub-human status. Two distinct, distressing strands of degradation, social and economic, often overlapping, afflicted the depressed classes, as they were called during the British days.”

We have made an attempt in these pages to provide a cross section of the thoughts as expressed by this renowned crusader and writer. We have quoted him liberally and presented his ideas in a lucid readable style with a certain sympathetic touch that humanizes and enlivens the most instructive passages of his writings and speeches.\* Not the least valuable of the contents of this volume are the views of other writers we have quoted in support of our own appraisal of Babasaheb. We are considerably indebted to the Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, for the numerous collections of Babasaheb’s writings which have provided the source materials of this book and in which we have taken refuge. Since the published volumes in question contain materials with little unity of theme, our treatment of them has not expectedly been seriatim and may look like sheer haphazardly and pellmell confusion. Grateful thanks are due to our publishers who gave their assent to the plan and published the book with commendable promptness which, we felt, symbolised their ardent and unwavering love of Babasaheb’s writings and achievement. No less important has

\* These have been abbreviated throughout the Notes to W.S.



been the help rendered by our colleagues in the Department of English, Patna University, where, for the most part, the work was undertaken and completed and where collaboration was sought from the learned Chairman of the Department, Dr. K. M. Tiwary. The volumes of printed materials were provided by Shri Jiyalal Arya and Shri S. P. Sinha to whom we are greatly thankful as we are also to our learned teachers who did much to dispel our ignorance of psycho-analytical norms (of which we still continue to be miserably ignorant). Ours is a modest attempt to study a towering personality, a personality the heights of which one cannot even dream of attaining unless one is a born genius. No contemporary of Babasaheb did in fact attain it; at least no political thinker or reader did.

Finally, we thank those scholars who by writing on Ambedkar in their biographies and in critical evaluations lighted our task and made this study possible. We are also thankful to those learned friends, now engaged in teaching history and sociology at the premier University of Patna, who read the book in its manuscript form and advised us on the many problems of scholarship which often stared us in the face and which we could not have resolved without their ungrudging co-operation. We found in Mr. Digvijay Narayan Singh a worthy amanuensis who worked with us regularly for months on end.

R. C. PRASAD



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## 1

*Introduction*

In the Introduction to the first volume of *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* the Editorial Board has briefly and forcefully highlighted Babasaheb's versatility, the essential nature of his achievement in the field of social thought and his activities as an enlightened reformer-scholar interested in the political, economic and social set-up of the country. It has been aptly pointed out that Babasaheb's "Thoughts as reflected in his writings and speeches have significant importance in tracing the history and growth of social thought in India." It is not impossible nor even difficult to characterize with considerable evidence his vision as prophetic, for, as the Editorial Board has remarked, "as time passes, many of his (Babasaheb's) observations in matters social, economic and political are coming true." What has added to the relevance and significance of Babasaheb's thought is the historical fact that India to-day is passing through a period of social tension and caste conflict, some of which appear to be unsurmountable. The persistent effort and hard work of social reformers and political leaders have not yielded much profitable result, and the communal and social tensions continue to bedevil the country, nullifying whatever was done by the reformers of yesteryear. "Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts have, therefore, assumed more relevance to-day. If his solutions and remedies on various socio-economic problems are understood and followed, it may help us to steer through the present turmoil and guide us for the future. It was therefore very apt on the part of the Government of Maharashtra to have appointed an Advisory Committee to compile all the material available on Dr. Ambedkar for publishing the same in a suitable form."<sup>1</sup>

Babasaheb's writings reveal a versatile, heroic personality, an individual who lost himself in the well-being of the country as a whole, placed his own life in the life of the down-trodden and the socially underprivileged, and dedicated it to the annihilation of the obnoxious caste system. Though an enlightened intellectual himself, Babasaheb noted with regret and dissatisfaction that the reformers among the high-caste Hindus had, in spite of their enlightened learning and scholarship, confined their activities to the abolition of enforced widowhood, child-marriage, etc. What shocked and pained him most was that these enlightened intellectuals, the great reformers celebrated in history for their innovative and revolutionary spirit, "did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of castes nor did they have courage to agitate against it." He was, in fact, convinced that "the political revolutions in India were preceded by the social and religious reforms led by saints. But during the British rule, issue of political independence got precedence over the social reform and therefore social reform continued to remain neglected. Pointing to the Socialists, he remarked that the Socialists will have to fight against the monster of caste either before or after the revolution. He asserts that caste is not based on division of labour. It is a division of labourers. As an economic organisation also, caste is a harmful institution."<sup>2</sup>

The real enemy of the Indian society which continues to be miserably fragmented and pathetically ignorance-ridden is caste, or, in other words, endogamic brahmanic organization which has perpetuated the system, setting one caste against another and letting loose all forms of social slavery. It is the religious dogmatists and confirmed communalists who have 'stung and stigmatized' the dalit section of society, exploited it in the name of religion and caste hierarchy, and reduced its members to the position of mute chattels. Babasaheb fought the system with any weapons that came to hand. He had nothing but scorn for its inconsistencies and inveighed against the brahmanic culture for its phoney ideal of ceremonial purity. Like a true democrat and upholder of the principles of social justice and equality, he despised the institution of caste and class, especially the principle of strict endogamy, for its gross and exploitative conception of the system which had dehumanized the dalits and crowned the

brahmans with so much religious and social power. Himself a dalit, he had faced the socio-economic shackles and cultural inhibitions which had sterilized all but the upper classes. "Annihilate the caste," he said, "if you do not want exploitation of the masses to be perpetuated; annihilate it if you desire secularism and democracy to take roots in the country; annihilate it thou must, retain it now forever thou canst not." Where the preceding reformers often saw only some evil in the caste system, Babasaheb also saw danger. If they insisted on reform, Babasaheb replied that the system was fraught with evil as well as danger. It is no wonder that he called upon every Indian to do away with the system. As an economic organization also, caste is a harmful institution. He, therefore, appealed to every Hindu to annihilate this noisome system which was a great hindrance to social solidarity, and to set up a new social order based on the ideals of justice and equality in consonance with the principles of democracy. He advocates inter-caste marriage as one of the solutions to the caste problem. But he also stresses that the belief in the 'śāstras' is the mainspring of this hateful 'cult of inhumanity'. He, therefore, suggests: "Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the śāstras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the śāstras and he or she will interdine and intermarry." According to him, society must be based on the principle of 'one man, one value', and not on the atrocious traditions of caste system which was, in his view, a menace, like the system of slavery. It lacked the element which alone could make it imperative to a free individual, namely, that it could be recognized as his good, and that the outer law—the caste system—became the inner motive. But if Ambedkar wished the system to be destroyed root and branch, it was on account of the low estimation in which he held the so-called holy brahmanism and the ignorance of the bulk of its adherents.

Judge Babasaheb by any standard you hold dear, examine his writings in whatever light you wish to examine them, he will stand above all his contemporaries, above all his mentors and listeners, commanding them to realize the injustice done to the suppressed classes and rise to heroic notions of human equality, secularism and co-existence. Judge him, so that you may ultimately find in him a brilliant debater and behold in him an

indomitable fighter and democrat whose utterances awaked the slumbering capability of all into thought. "It is," said Carlyle, "ever the way with the Thinker, the spiritual Hero." Though there was nothing divine about him, yet he was for the socially downtrodden and victims of socio-economic exploitation a spiritual leader, an emancipated saviour, and a messiah. What this charismatic man said, "all men were not far from saying, were longing to say. The thoughts of all start up, as from painful enchanted sleep, round his thought; answering to it. Yes, even so! Joyful to men as the dawning of day from night;—is it not, indeed, the awakening for them from no-being into being, from death into life? We still honour such a man; call him poet, genius, and so forth: but to these wild men he was a very magician, a worker of miraculous unexpected blessing for them; a prophet, a God!—thought once awakened does not again slumber; unfolds itself into a system of thought; grows. in man after man, generation after generation,—till its full stature is reached, and *such* system of thought can grow no farther, but must give place to another."<sup>3</sup>

The sphere in which Babasaheb's talent displayed itself was indeed law, but he was essentially a trail-blazer, a leader of distinction in the true sense of the term. If a truly great man can be all sorts of men, then Babasaheb contained in him a large variety of men—he could be, and he indeed was, all sorts of men. It is not difficult to locate the politician, the thinker, the lawyer, the orator and the reformer in him—in one or the other degree he was all these. Gifted with a great glowing heart, with the fire that was in it, with the bursting tears that were in it, he could feel and express his thought with an uncanny force; he could speak his thought with a remarkable eloquence, like a born orator. The things he said are full of sagacity and geniality, like the sayings of no less a man than Gandhi himself. One of the things which smote his conscience was the concept of *chaturvarnya*, a concept which was to him utterly repellant and to which all the iniquities of the elite classes on 'the fallen fifth of Indian humanity' could be traced. A close examination of the system had convinced him that as a system of social organization, *chaturvarnya* was both impracticable and harmful and had turned out to be a miserable failure. Speaking as he does in his custom-



ary manner, blended with matchless outspokenness, he refers to the protagonists of the system, to those who did not take into account the several difficulties it raised. Ambedkar distinguishes the principle underlying caste from that underlying varna. The two principles—of caste and of varna—are fundamentally different from and opposed to each other. The principle underlying caste is based on worth: “How are you going to compel people who have acquired a higher status based on birth without reference to their worth to vacate that status? How are you going to compel people to recognize the status due to a man in accordance with his worth, who is occupying a lower status based on his birth? For this you must first break up the Caste System, in order to be able to establish the *Varna* system. How are you going to reduce the four thousand castes, based on birth, to the four *Varnas*, based on worth? This is the first difficulty which the protagonists of the Chaturvarnya must grapple with. There is a second difficulty which the protagonists of Chaturvarnya must grapple with, if they wish to make the establishment of Chaturvarnya a success.”<sup>1</sup>

Such views as these are in violent opposition to those of the majority of Hindus; they are pre-eminently for the man who is not of the mass, but for the man whose head is lifted, however little, above the common level. They justify the success of that man, the man above all men. Those views ranged for some people from the philosophically rebellious to the socially repulsive. Many of them, such as Babasaheb's characterization of brahmins, especially of the orthodox ones, acted as incitement to the disgruntled social outcasts—the panchamas—and the new class of incendiary reservationists that has emerged in recent years and to the Mandalists.

To Gandhi's “Non-violence is all” Ambedkar might have added “Extirpation of the brahmanic order is everything.” He put anti-brahmanism into every object he saw, every person he met, everything he touched. He worked, even to his deriders, with such penetration that he plunged through the surface of appearance to the reality of being and spoke with a conviction which startled many readers. He did not succeed in doing away with the evils of castes, but he did succeed in uncovering some of the dangerous consequences following the adoption of the

system. He has graphically described one of the principal difficulties involved in accepting the ideal of social organization called *chaturvarnya* or the division of society into four classes:

How are you going to maintain the system of *Chaturvarnya*, supposing it was established? One important requirement for the successful working of *Chaturvarnya* is the maintenance of the penal system which could maintain it by its sanction. The system of *Chaturvarnya* must perpetually face the problem of the transgressor. Unless there is a penalty attached to the act of transgression, men will not keep to their respective classes. The whole system will break down, being contrary to human nature. *Chaturvarnya* cannot subsist by its own inherent goodness. It must be enforced by law. That without penal sanction the ideal of *Chaturvarnya* cannot be realized, is proved by the story in the *Ramayana* of Rama killing *Shambuka*. Some people seem to blame Rama because he wantonly and without reason killed *Shambuka*. But to blame Rama for killing *Shambuka* is to misunderstand the whole situation. *Ram Raj* was a *Raj* based on *Chaturvarnya*. As a king, Rama was bound to maintain *Chaturvarnya*. It was his duty therefore to kill *Shambuka*, the *Shudra*, who had transgressed his class and wanted to be a *Brahmin*. This is the reason why Rama killed *Shambuka*. But this also shows that penal sanction is necessary for the maintenance of *Chaturvarnya*. Not only penal sanction is necessary, but penalty of death is necessary. That is why Rama did not inflict on *Shambuka* a lesser punishment. That is why *Manu-Smriti* prescribes such heavy sentences as cutting off the tongue or pouring of molten lead in the ears of the *Shudra*, who recites or hears the *Veda*. The supporters of *Chaturvarnya* must give an assurance that they could successfully classify men and they could induce modern society in the twentieth century to reforge the penal sanctions of *Manu-Smriti*.<sup>5</sup>

What was really painful to the noble humanist was the country-wide illiteracy eating into the vitals of the Indian people, the widespread social anarchy to which this illiteracy led, a kind of anarchy that made living impossible for them all, especially for

the Hindus who were subjected to exploitation day in, day out by the priestly classes who thrived on their blood like so many parasites. Performance of multitudinous rites and rituals, rigorous customs and abstinences render the young Hindu old and decrepit, causing his mind to be immeasurably fettered, cabined, cribbed and confined.

Destruction of such an exploitative religion as Hinduism, which unleashed so much social inequality and terror, was the need of the hour. Nothing else could ameliorate the deplorable plight of its adherents. Babasaheb appeared at the opportune moment and with his coming came the clarion call: "Annihilate the castes, the civilization that is more appropriately called felony, and the religion that regards submen—its own men—as causing pollution only by a physical touch." To a rational human being casteist Hinduism is a house built on iniquities and on exploitation of man by man. How is one to endure the existence of a system, religious or secular, which encourages untouchability and consequently reduces some people to a position worse than that of the social underdog. Writing on civilization or felony, Babasaheb drew his readers' attention to those sections of the Hindu society which consists of the untouchables, the unapproachables and the down-graded dregs. "What a degradation for these unfortunate souls who have been turned by this Hindu Civilization into social lepers! To be called an Untouchable is enough of a misfortune. But to require an Untouchable to proclaim by his own mouth his shame that he is an Untouchable is a cruelty to which in my opinion there is no parallel. What would an Untouchable say of this Hindu Civilization? Would it be wrong if he said that it is felony and not civilization?"<sup>6</sup>

Quoting Alberuni who expressed surprise at the peculiarity of the Hindu social organization, Babasaheb has subscribed to the traveller's account of the origin of the four castes or varnas. This he does to expose the absurdity of the whole caste system, the system that encourages repression and segregation. The caste system, prevalent wherever the Hindus are, has led to the creation and unleashing of a system of isolating one section of people from another, man from man. The obscurantist priestly Hindus are worse than ferocious beasts, completely devoid of human sympathies. What is ridiculous and absurd is their belief

that the brahmanas were created from the head of Brahma, the kṣatriyas from the shoulders and hands of the Creator, the vaiśyas from his thigh, and the śūdras from his feet. "Between the latter two classes there is no very great distance. Much, however, as these classes differ from each other, they live together in the same towns and villages, mixed together in the same houses and lodgings.

"After the Śūdra follow the people called Antyaja, who render various kinds of services, who are not reckoned amongst any caste, but only as members of a certain craft or profession. There are eight classes of them who freely intermarry with each other, except the fuller, shoemaker and weaver, for no others would condescend to have anything to do with them. These eight guilds are the fuller, shoemaker, juggler, the basket and shield maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds, and the weaver. The four castes do not live together with them in one and the same place. These guilds live near the villages and towns of the four castes, but outside them.

"The people called Hadi, Doma (Domba), Candala and Badhatau (sic) are not reckoned amongst any caste or guild. They are occupied with dirty work, like the cleansing of the villages and other services. They are considered as one sole class, and distinguished only by their occupations. In fact, they are considered like illegitimate children; for according to general opinion they descend from a Śūdra father and a Brahmani mother as the children of fornication; therefore they are degraded outcaste."<sup>7</sup>

Babasaheb endorsed Alberuni's account that the Hindus ostracized the menial castes and loathed their very presence. By championing their cause, Babasaheb at once became their unquestioned leader. For the first time the weaker sections of the caste-ridden Indian society saw in him their saviour and emancipator. He threw an open challenge to those who upheld the devilish system of varna-division and who believed in perpetuating the exploitation of Antyajas and Adivasis. That he was endowed with all the enviable qualities of a leader of the many-millions of downtrodden is apparent from the following speech delivered at Nagpur on July 20, 1942:

You have less need of an assurance from me that I will fight for the ideal. I stand in greater need of an assurance from you. You have assured me of your love and affection. It was quite unnecessary. I want an assurance of another kind. It is an assurance of strength, unity and determination to stand for our rights, fight for our rights and never to turn back until we win our rights. You promise to do your part. I promise to do mine. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. It is a matter of joy to fight this battle. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or sordid in it. For our struggle is for our freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social system and will continue to be suppressed and mutilated if in the political struggle, the Hindus win and we lose. My final words of advice to you are "Educate, Organise and Agitate", have faith in yourselves and never lose hope. I shall always be with you as I know you will be with me.<sup>8</sup>

Ambedkar saw into the very heart of things and stood face to face with reality. He saw the hollowness of brahmanism hidden beneath a veneer of spirituality. The core, thoroughly rotten and festering, was about to collapse. It was in its death throes. He deemed his duty to give it the last death blow, to smash the whole fabric of brahmanism, the iniquity of caste system, and to destroy the brood of the so-called *bhudevas* who were but so many vampires feasting on the blood of the under-privileged masses. To him, the caste system had given rise to a section of humanity worse than pariahs. Though the brahmans flaunted their spirituality and swore by the *Vedas*, they were all hollow men, empty of all wisdom, fleshy and pot-bellied, so many ignoramus masquerading as profound pundits. Babasaheb saw the crumbling edifice of brahmanism, the tottering system about to give way to a new order fast emerging, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the age-old system of exploitation.

That was not the only facet of this Mahar militant. Nor was he known only as a social crusader and a champion of the lowly-born, hungry masses who were subject to the barbarity of untouchability committed by the parasitic upper classes and their

lackeys and minions. He was a rare constitution-maker whose profound legal wisdom was a matter of envy to the country's legal luminaries. A democrat unalienably wedded to the ideals of democracy and secularism, he 'built, through legislative measures, social equality for the trampled weak'. In Prof. N. G. Ranga's view, it was his "fortuitous position of Law Minister and acknowledged scholarship in law and his championship for decades of the cause of the suppressed classes," that accounted for his choice as the principal 'architect and pilot' of the Constitution Bill of Free India in the epochal Constituent Assembly. His writings, such as 'From a Double Standard to a Silver Standard', 'The Silver Standard and the Dislocation of its Parity', 'Currency and Exchange', 'The Present Problem in Indian Currency', 'The Evaluation of Provincial Finance in British India', etc. reveal his interest in and mastery of administrative and financial matters. 'The crusader turned law-giver', 'a new Manu'—this is how some Parliamentarians often describe him "as if in vengeance against the wrong charters of rights allowed to upper classes and inhuman denial of rights sanctified by the ancient Manu Smriti." But of all the faces he wore, that of the crusader fitted him most and was in keeping with his spirit—the spirit of a true warrior and iconoclast, a genuine stalwart challenging the age-old social norms and injustices. What is really amazing is that these faces of the man ultimately fused into one charming face, the face of an imposing personality, venerable for its considerably profound erudition and illimitably wide reading. His reviews and forewords are no less filled with the sophisticated profundity of his intellect and with an objectivity which is rare in those also interested in political affairs. It is also interesting, often staggering, to learn that he did not just analyse and state a problem, however intricate or baffling, but he also suggested reasonable solutions whether acceptable to those seeking them or not. And the problems were there, not only in the social sphere, with which he was thoroughly acquainted, but also in the economic and political spheres, one such problem being that of the rupee. Highlighting this aspect of this charismatic economist, Kamalkishor Kadam has quite appropriately observed:

Dr. Ambedkar had the unique distinction of being closely associated with the events and policies that eventually climaxed into the political federation with strong Centre and autonomous states after the inauguration of the Constitutional Government in India in 1950.

His evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Currency shows a new facet of his multi-dimensional personality as an expert in public finance whose words evoked appreciation and attention of English scholars of his time. His dissertation on the finances of the East India Company is a memorable document that finds place in the present volume for which thanks are due to the University of Columbia. Dr. Ambedkar was then 24 years of age. It may perhaps interest the readers to know his reactions to the finance of the East India Company. There are flashes of his genius and his acute mind could consider pros and cons in a balance. It is difficult to resist the temptation to quote his words from the said dissertation of 1915, which constitute the balance-sheet of the British Empire."

Babasaheb was not only in the forefront of the attacks, started earlier, on all manifestations of insularity, whether social, religious, or political; he himself often led such attacks and convinced his countrymen that no amount of washing and cleansing in the holy river purifies a person without internal purity, tolerance and humanity. To the fifth volume of his writings and speeches published by the Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, a special importance is attached, for herein are contained such historical pieces as "What it is to be an Untouchable", "Roots of the Problem", "What the Untouchables have to Face", etc. It is on these pieces that we would like to concentrate, anatomizing them for their unique relevance to the India of today where caste and communal tensions are still the order of the day. We hear of mounting hostilities between the suppressed castes, who continued to be subjected to all kinds of ignominy, including physical torture, and the savarna Hindus wallowing in their ill-gotten wealth and harassing and harrowing the so-called pariahs. To us, these essays are clearly reasoned and reveal a mind packed brimful with wisdom and learning, a mind keen

and insightful and intelligent, a rare mind with which only geniuses are gifted. These sublime outpourings also reveal Babasaheb's interest in Indian religious history and the effete Hindu scriptures, resulting in his effort to stimulate a general interest in ameliorating the deplorable condition of the trampled weak. His success in this direction may not be phenomenal, but he certainly sowed the seeds of later success. There is latent in his writings a prophecy that the rise of the downtrodden leading ultimately to the decline of brahmanism was imminent, that the semi-slaves of the country would one day shed their servility and break away from the rigours of the brahmanic caste hierarchy which had kept them fettered and enslaved for centuries and had fattened the privileged classes on their blood. Latent also in the writings are Ambedkar's comments on the loopholes of law, which, again, are clearly reasoned. The following excerpt would illustrate our point:

The worst of it is that all this injustice and persecution can be perpetrated within the limits of the law. A Hindu may well say that he will not employ an Untouchable, that he will not sell him anything, that he will evict him from his land, that he will not allow him to take his cattle across his field without offending the law in the slightest degree. In doing so, he is only expressing his right. The law does not care with what motive he does it. The law does not see what injury it causes to the Untouchable. The police may misuse his power and his authority. He may deliberately falsify the record by taking down something which has not been stated or by taking down something which is quite different from what has been stated. He may disclose evidence to the side in which he is interested. He may refuse to arrest. He may do a hundred and one things to spoil the case. All this he can do without the slightest fear of being caught. The loopholes of law are many, and he knows them well. The Magistrate has vested in him an enormous amount of discretion. He is free to use it. The decision of a case depends upon the witnesses who can give evidence. But the decision of the case depends upon whether the witnesses are reliable or not. It is open to the Magistrate to believe one side and disbelieve the other side.



He may be quite arbitrary in believing one side, but it is his discretion, and no one can interfere with it. There are innumerable cases in which this discretion has been exercised by the Magistrates to the prejudice of the Untouchables. However truthful the witnesses of the Untouchables the Magistrates take a common line by saying 'I disbelieve the witnesses', and nobody has questioned that discretion. What sentence to inflict is also a matter of discretion with the Magistrate. There are sentences which are non-appealable. An appeal is a way of getting redress. But this way may be blocked by a Magistrate by refusing to give an appealable sentence.<sup>10</sup>

What Babasaheb is stressing is not that law in its impartiality and objectivity takes its own course or that it is no respecter of any particular religion which it would favour or frown upon; he is also pointing to the possibility of the police misusing his power and his authority. He is referring to the administrative corruption rife in our country, corruption that vitiates the minds of our witnesses or compels the Magistrate to be 'quite arbitrary in believing one side, but it is his discretion, and no one can interfere with it'. A legal luminary and barrister himself, he was aware of those countless cases in which the Magistrates exercised their discretion 'to the prejudice of the Untouchables'. This is illustrative, Babasaheb felt, of corruption percolating through the seats of justice and through the judicial community.

He has no patience with the corrupt official, the inhuman insular man, the man who lives the narrow hidebound life full of prejudices and bigotry. In place of the decadent virtues extolled by the śāstras, he urges equality—one man, one value—and destruction of the caste system by reaching out beyond the confines of traditional Hindu mores and by overthrowing the position of the *Vedas*. "The question of all questions," he said, "is what made the Brahmins degrade the *Vedas* and supersede them by *Smritis*, *Puranas* and the *Tantras* if they regarded their *Vedas* as the most sacred?"<sup>11</sup>

Being a systematic thinker, he is never vague and confusing, ambiguous or ambivalent in his arguments or in constructing his sentences or in his choice of words. An evidence of his command of the English language is provided by his utterly but effectively

simple syntax in which every syllable is forced to yield the meaning he aimed to convey, preferring plain words to flamboyant ones. His prose style embodies all the salient traits of his personality—his candour, his outspokenness, his essential integrity and sincerity, clarity and simplicity. Just as his mind was clear so are his writings transparent and pellucid. They are capable of reflecting and communicating his irascible outbursts, his disparagements and disapprovals on the one hand and his approbations, acquiescences, and admirations on the other. The sentences are imitative of the movement of his thought, its rhythmic ebb and flow, its simplicity and complexity. It is therefore a true mirror of the man he was. The speeches, no less than the writings, reveal the same qualities of persuasiveness and simplicity as well as a unique freedom from ornate periods and extrinsic embellishment. Seldom does Babasaheb attempt to use exotic expressions, vapid figures, and vague, vaporous phrases. Though a very effective orator, he conveyed his meaning not in the Ciceronian manner, the way of wordiness, but in a manner of his own, simple and matter-of-fact. His was a mind attuned to his profession and shaped by the books, journals and periodicals he had so pragmatically and avidly assimilated. No sophistry is alien to the legal profession, in which the worse is often made the better reason; advocacy does not jettison rhetoric and sophistry. But Babasaheb, with his love of social justice and unflagging faith in the ultimate victory of truth, rejected the practice of some lawyers who resorted to tortuous arguments and satanic sophistry to achieve success. Babasaheb's oratorical speeches, like the one written for the 1936 annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore, remind us more of Swift's 'naked', unembellished, and plain style than of the style of the Roman orators. Like Swift, Ambedkar refuses to use—hazard—too many metaphors. His serious matter evoked a serious prosiness of style, a choice of matter-of-fact descriptive mode of writing free from all the lushness of poeticity. No verbal or syntactical ambiguity is allowed to creep in nor is the meaning left half-uncommunicated. Consider, for example, the following passage culled from a representative speech alluded to:

Every profession in India is regulated. Engineers must show proficiency, doctors must show proficiency, lawyers must

show proficiency, before they are allowed to practise their professions. During the whole of their career, they must not only obey the law of the land, civil as well as criminal, but they must also obey the special code of morals prescribed by their respective professions. The priest's is the only profession where proficiency is not required. The profession of a Hindu priest is the only profession which is not subject to any code. Mentally a priest may be an idiot, physically a priest may be suffering from a foul disease, such as syphilis or gonorrhoea, morally he may be a wreck. But he is fit to officiate at solemn ceremonies, to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* of a Hindu temple and worship the Hindu God. All this becomes possible among the Hindus because for a priest it is enough to be born in a priestly caste. The whole thing is abominable and is due to the fact that the priestly class among Hindus is subject neither to law nor to morality. It recognizes no duties. It knows only of rights and privileges. It is a pest which divinity seems to have let loose on the masses for their mental and moral degradation. The priestly class must be brought under control by some such legislation as I have outlined above. It will prevent it from doing mischief and from misguiding people.<sup>12</sup>

That the speaker brings rhetoric to bear on the construction of the sentences is obvious: "Engineers must show proficiency, doctors must show proficiency, lawyers must show proficiency." The device used is plain but effective. The repetition of 'show proficiency' in three successive sentences is tremendously powerful and yet simple. Like every meaningful device in oratory, it is deeply effective. In general, Babasaheb avoids decorating his speeches with flourishes of style and quotations. His sentences—prosaic, humdrum and infinitely limpid—sink into the listener's heart, stir it to its depths, and propel him in the direction of taking a revolutionary action. He concentrates on the search for purely simple words to express emotional and spiritual intensity recollected in tranquillity, as it were. An example of this is the excerpt quoted above. He uses repetition and similar other devices to intensify his thought and feeling and to bring millions

of his readers both in India and abroad an inspiring new interpretation of Hinduism.

Of the contemporary social and religious reformers and political leaders, Ambedkar, himself an upright and efficient jurist, was certainly best qualified to demand proficiency of all classes of people, including the Hindu priestly class. He reminds us that the *śāstras* are open to endless interpretations and that they have been misquoted and misrepresented by all kinds of mischief-mongers and monsters of ignorance again and again. He describes with unmistakable clarity how the casteist Hindus have lavished their favours on their priests, helped them to constitute a special priestly aristocracy and, while demanding proficiency from every professional man, left them free, without, that is, subjecting them to law or to morality. His practice of amplifying an idea with the help of repeated emphases on it so simplifies it that no ambiguity or obscurity is experienced by the listener. What is striking is that while Ambedkar shuns verbal repetitions as much as possible, he does not abandon the trick of systematic repetition. The idea to be conveyed is no doubt repeated but the words are generally not, which is why the listeners do not return with any offensive experience or find them in bad taste.

Babasaheb's diatribes against Hinduism and the Hindu priestly class appeared at an opportune moment. It was a time when revolutionary ideas in other areas were also developing. The pressure for political independence, the dissatisfaction of the peasantry with the traditional power of the landed aristocracy—*zamindars*—the *Satyagrahas*, and Non-Cooperation Movement gave clear evidence that the old order in the country was fast disintegrating. New ways of looking at things—politics, religion, language, the English rulers, etc.—were proliferating and discernible in almost every sphere of activity. Babasaheb himself was pleading on behalf of the socially submerged menial masses in his strong attacks on the brahmanic systems that had divided society into so many castes, at the head of which were the abominably ruthless priestly parasites. His speeches and writings are in essence just pleas for the liberation of the poor, the down-trodden, and the oppressed, especially the untouchable. For example, this statement appeared on behalf of them: "Does not a Shudra need to have an aspiration to reach God? Manu prob-

ably would have answered these questions in the affirmative. Why did he then make such rules. The answer is that he was a staunch believer in social inequality and he knew the danger of admitting religious Equality. If I am equal before God why am I not equal on earth? Manu was probably terrified by this question. Rather than admit and allow religious equality to affect social inequality he preferred to deny religious equality."<sup>13</sup> Rejecting Manu's explanation of the origin of the various castes, Babasaheb shows the absurdity of the orthodox point of view: "He says that leaving aside the four original castes the rest are simply base-born!! He says they are the progeny of fornication and adultery between men and women of the four original castes. The immorality and looseness of character among men and women of the four original castes must have been limitless to account for the rise of innumerable castes consisting of innumerable souls!! Manu makes the wild allegation without stopping to consider what aspersions he is casting upon men and women of the four original castes. For if the chandals—the old name for the untouchables—are the progeny of a Brahman female and a Shudra male then it is obvious that to account for such a large number of Chandals it must be assumed that every Brahman woman was slut and a whore and every Shudra lived an adulterous life with complete abandon."<sup>14</sup> Last but by no means least, the *Vedas*, said to be the fountainhead of all Hindu thought and religion, were put into their proper place by Babasaheb's Riddles collected in the fourth volume of his writings and speeches. It may also be noted that the general simplicity and incontrovertible arguments, plus the scholarly references and allusions, make them very attractive even to the average reader.

In the *Riddles in Hinduism: An Exposition to Enlighten the Masses*, Babasaheb set down no less than twenty Riddles with irrefutable evidence to reveal the delusion and mystery that Hinduism is. Here, as in all other expositions, Babasaheb's account is comprehensive and reviews the subject from all possible angles; in the present case, from the religious, social, and political angles divided into three parts. In the Introduction to the Riddles he has made it clear that he wants 'to make the mass of people to realize that Hindu religion is not Sanatan,' that they (Hindu masses) 'have been deceived and misguided by the

Brahmins', and that the latter, though claiming to be 'unchanging', have 'changed and chopped': "There was a time when they worshipped the Vedic Gods. Then came a time when they abandoned their Vedic Gods and started worshipping non-Vedic Gods. One may well ask them—where is Indra, where is Varuna, where is Brahma, where is Mitra—the Gods mentioned in the Vedas. They have all disappeared. And why, because the worship of Indra, Varuna and Brahma ceased to be profitable."

These are bold if not new and revolutionary concepts. For several thousand years before Babasaheb, leading Hindu thinkers and scholars had been tenaciously holding the view that the Vedas were sanatan. To the Hindu believer, the Vedas are infallible; to Babasaheb, however, this is absurd and ridiculous, "a most mischievous dogma which the Brahmins have spread among the masses . . . If the Hindu intellect has ceased to grow and if the Hindu civilization and culture has become a stagnant and stinking pool, this dogma must be destroyed root and branch if India is to progress. The Vedas are a worthless set of books."<sup>15</sup>

With the division of the subject-matter into many different parts, each dealing with an aspect of Hinduism, the total output runs into thousands of pages in which Babasaheb attempts to dwell upon the malaise which has affected Hindu society. He traces it to the brahmins, to their incorrigible acquisitiveness and inhuman cupidity, and to their colossally powerful hold on the masses of Hindu believers.

To highlight this specifically negative aspect of Ambedkar's achievement is not to be blind to his positive achievement or to his contribution to the present-day Indian society. These two aspects are, however, inter-dependent, for by revealing the nature of the deception, he also cautions the deceived and the gullible Hindu masses, especially the downtrodden, who, duped for thousands of years, have now realized how atrocious the brahmanas and the members of the upper-caste elites have been. Thanks to Ambedkar they are now awake to their condition. Babasaheb's writings have produced the desired effect. His profound legal education was also to win and hold the respect of his learned associates so that they accepted his leadership and views, even though some ensitive humanists, such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Morarjee Desai

and others, were members of the upper castes. In part this acceptance was due to his intellectual magnetism, eloquence, rationalism, sincerity of purpose, and unselfish devotion to the cause of the weaker communities. Endowed as he was with these rare qualities, he had courage and intelligence enough to oppose even Gandhi at times, as he did in 1933 on the question of the bills in regard to the question of temple entry introduced by Doctor Subbarayan in the Madras Legislative Council.<sup>16</sup> Gandhiji wanted Babasaheb to support the bills, but the latter "firmly but politely told Gandhiji that he would have nothing to do with Doctor Subbarayan's bill because it did not condemn untouchability as a sin . . . Dr. Ambedkar went on to tell Gandhiji that the depressed classes were no longer prepared to be treated as *Śūdras* or untouchables. Gandhiji pleaded with Dr. Ambedkar on this issue and stated that according to him the Hindu caste system was not a bad one."<sup>17</sup> Said Gandhiji, "Let the touchable Hindus have an opportunity to expiate their sins and purify Hinduism . . . . If this reformation (i.e. the throwing open of temples to the untouchables), (*sic*) takes place, the untouchables would rise in society." Dr. Ambedkar, however, rejected this argument politely and firmly, saying that "he was convinced that if the untouchables were allowed to make progress in the economic, educational and political fields, temple entry would follow automatically. It was, therefore, to him an irrelevant issue. In other words, he told Gandhiji with his characteristic firmness combined with politeness that untouchability could not be removed unless the caste system was removed from the Hindu society . . . . The out-caste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be out-castes as long as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the out-caste except the destruction of the caste system. Nothing can help Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle against the British except purging the Hindu faith . . .".<sup>18</sup>

There is more to Ambedkar's writings and speeches than meets the eye. In order to comprehend his meaning and the range of his every gesture and nuance, one must read between his lines. Despite the lip service we pay to his ideals, we have done very little to translate them into action. The notion of the inferiority of certain classes of people as human beings is still, even after

more than four decades of the country's independence, in vogue. Abortive attempts are often made to ameliorate their plight and follow Babasaheb's cherished ideals of liberty, secularism, democracy, equality, and fraternity, but they lack Babasaheb's sincerity of purpose, his determination and his intelligence. Their leaders have failed because of their insularity and lack of will power. On the other hand, the work of Babasaheb has had a great relevance and is still valued, not for its success but for what it is—for its inherent nobility and humanity. There are those who criticize his advocacy of a casteless Hindu society free from sordid brahmanic influences, a society in which the so-called sub-humans are given their due and are not unequal to those who belong to the upper castes, but they cannot ignore what he wrote in this area. To us he is principally a thinker and a leader, not only a leader of the untouchables or their champion; he is also a great soul, a Mahatma engaged in eradicating the evils that had been eating into the vitals of Hinduism from time immemorial, a crusader fighting day in, day out against all kinds of odds for the liberation of the afflicted masses. He was thus a practical revolutionary who used his studies of law and history to forge ideological weapons to be used in a world-wide social struggle for the liberation of the hungry, outcaste categories. In fact, in his speeches and writings, Babasaheb was trying to analyse the nature of the corruption with which Hinduism was afflicted and the role of the brahmins in setting this downward trend and in aiding and abetting corruption. As he looked about in the provinces, he saw a certain section of society living under inhuman conditions, oppressed and ostracized by upper caste men who were feudal in mentality and veritable comprador parasites disguised as brahmins learned in the *Vedas* and *nigamas* and *agamas*. Babasaheb had not only had an extraordinarily insightful mind to probe their hypocrisy but a powerful pen as well. He had the double satisfaction of seeing his services employed by the Parliament of the country and foreseeing that his candid appraisal of Hinduism and its Riddles had been accepted by all the weaker sections of society to an unprecedented degree.



NOTES

1. *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 1, p. xiii.
2. *Ibid* , p. xiv.
3. *Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 29.
4. *W.S.*, Vol. 1, pp. 59-60.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.
6. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 142.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-48.
8. M.L. Shahare, *Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar His Life and Work* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 75.
9. Introduction to *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 6, p. ix.
10. *Ibid* , Vol. 5, pp. 106-07
11. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 61.
12. Speech prepared for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore, *Writings And Speeches*, Vol. 1 p. 77.
13. *W.S.*, Vol. 3, p. 36.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
15. *Ibid.*, Vol 4, p. 8.
16. See M. L. Shahare, *op. cit* , p. 58
17. *Ibid*
18. *Ibid.*



## 2

### *A New Manu in the Making*

Ambedkar's life and work have been described in many books by scholars and reformist leaders who make a point of quoting—or of misquoting—his essays and speeches on brahmanism to which he was avowedly hostile. The biography of this great legal luminary and law maker has become, especially in the recent years, one of the main issues in the pro-and-anti-Mandal Movement. The adversaries of the Mandal Movement and of the Government policies of liberating the 'down-graded dregs of the Hindu fold' and the tribal people from the tyranny of the upper castes, their oppressive, feudal outlook and their 'burning injustices' have been trying to play off the young Hindu Ambedkar against the mature Buddhist and to discover contradictions in his writings. The orthodox savarna Hindus have been especially assiduous in trying to prove that Ambedkar's vituperative outpourings against brahmanism are born of deep-seated prejudice and that the Vedas are not what he says they are.

The assertions and fallacies spread by the diehard Hindu fundamentalists and pseudo-nationalists have been exploded by an objective presentation of Ambedkar's biography by such writers as Dhananjay Keer, W.N. Kuber, M.L. Sahare, and others. They show that Babasaheb was a consistent defender of the teeming millions of the so-called mlechhas who have been deprived of their human rights to equality and justice, of the ostracized people who have been politically and socially powerless and propertyless. To us, as to them, Babasaheb was a fearless critic of the iniquities of the caste system and of the śāstras, some of the instructions of which had segregated large chunks of the Hindu population and branded them untouchables. To us, again,

Babasaheb had the zeal of a revolutionary trail-blazer, of an ardent crusader and rebel in love with a new order and enemy of the old. The outworn systems, cruel and oppressive, that had been undermining the already tottering fabric of Hinduism must be annihilated, Babasaheb said, and we assert he was right. To us, all is not rotten in the state of Hinduism nor does Hinduism need to be liquidated; it is the deadly malaise that needs to be diagnosed and treated. Amputation of the ailing, decaying organs is the last remedy.

Born on April 14, 1891 in a Mahar family of untouchable Hindus, Ambedkar's first name was Bhim Sakpal. He was precocious, intelligent, sensitive, and talented. His father, Ramji Sakpal, had fourteen children. His mother, Bhimabai, a pious and gentle woman, was self-respecting, though, like her husband, superstitious as well. A story associated with the birth of Bhim has been recounted by Dhananjay Keer as follows:

... one of the uncles of Ramji Sakpal who had turned sannyasin—a term for a hermit—some years later in his grand old age came in the company of some hermits upon Mhow in Central India where Ramji Sakpal resided with his family. One of the women from his family, who was on her way to the river for washing purposes, happened to pass by the group of hermits among whom was the old relative. She at once recognised him. Ramji Sakpal ran to him and entreated him to bless his house with a visit. But as the sannyasin had renounced the world he would not come. However, he conferred on Ramji Sakpal a boon that a boy would be born in the family who would leave his mark on history. Entranced with the belief, Ramji Sakpal and his wife intensified their religious observances. The boon took effect at Mhow, on April 14, 1891, in the birth of a boy who was named Bhim and who became really a picturesque figure in the history of Hindustan.<sup>1</sup>

While Ramji, a garrulous person, famed for his sincerity and orthodoxy, was unflinchingly devoted to God, Bhimabai was, it is said, 'self-reliant', a woman who, like her husband, came of a family that belonged to the Kabir cult. The mother died when

Bhim was only about six years old. Of her children, only five out of fourteen survived; "Balaram was the eldest, Anandrao was the second, then followed two daughters, Manjula and Tulsi, and the youngest was Bhim, who in later life humourously (sic) called himself *Chaudave Ratna* which signified 'a sound thrashing'."<sup>2</sup> After his mother's death, Bhim was looked after by Mirabai, Ramji's sister, and by his own sister one by one. Bhim, being the youngest, was, it is said, a cynosure of his aunt's eyes, a centre of her family's attraction and its favourite.

The boy inherited some of the best and most outstanding qualities of his parents. Ramji Sakpal was not only industrious to the hilt but also equally pious, a confirmed teetotaller and vegetarian. His biographers have also noted his proficiency in the Marathi language, which he taught his pupils and children who learnt from him how 'to use appropriate words'. In addition to Marathi, Ramji had also studied English and arithmetic. Another outstanding quality of the man was his love of games, especially those of cricket and football. "No wonder then that Bhim derived from his father his painstaking spirit, his forceful mental energy and the intense interest in the welfare of his society."<sup>3</sup>

Bhim received his primary education at Satara, after which he was admitted into a high school along with his elder brother. Even as a school student he had to suffer many injustices and indignities on account of his untouchability and meniality and made to realize how hateful the caste system was which made people slight and torture him and brand him as an untouchable. He recalled in later years how a caste Hindu cartman, realizing that he was an accursed untouchable, had thrown him and his brother out on the road in a fit of rage on their way to Geregaoon where his father worked as a cashier. The cartman, though assuredly ignorant of the *śāstras*, had inherited the belief that by touching an *achhuta* one polluted oneself. When he threw the boys out on the road, refusing to travel with them in his cart, he was under the absurd impression that his wooden cart would be contaminated by their touch. Such insults and indignities inflicted upon the ill-starred untouchables were very common. They were unfit for human association. Bhim's experiences of these school days remained alive in his memory till the end and when he

wrote on the evils of the caste system he recounted quite a few episodes in which an untouchable had been subjected to insufferable insult and contempt. He came to realize in those callow youthful years that the Hindus had an absolute feeling of revulsion towards the untouchables and that the mere presence of the pariahs was enough to drive the touchables away. Untouchability, the boy felt, was perhaps obligatory. Since he was born an untouchable, he must be subject to all the disabilities of an untouchable. In later years Ambedkar compared the condition of the slaves in the Roman Empire with that of the untouchables. "It is a comparison between the worst of one side and the best of the other, for the present times are supposed to be the golden age for the Untouchables. How does the *de facto* condition of the Untouchables compare with the *de facto* condition of the slaves? How many Untouchables are engaged as the slaves in Rome were, in professions such as those of Librarians, Amanuenses, Shorthandwriters? How many Untouchables are engaged, as the slaves in Rome were, in such intellectual occupations as those of rhetoricians, grammarians, philosophers, tutors, doctors and artists? How many Untouchables are engaged, as the slaves in Rome? Can any Hindu dare to give an affirmative answer to anyone of these queries? The Untouchables are completely shut out from any of these avenues in which the slaves found so large a place. This proves how futile is the line of defence adopted by the Hindus to justify untouchability. The pity of the matter is that most people condemn slavery simply because they hold that for one man or class to have by law the power of life and death over another is wrong. They forget that there can be cruel oppression, tyranny, and persecution, with the train of misery . . ."<sup>4</sup>

The untouchables in India were to Ambedkar worse than slaves and untouchability was 'a worse type of an unfree social order'. Whereas slavery was not obligatory, untouchability was. There was, he said, no compulsion on anyone who did not want to hold another person as his slave. An untouchable, however, was deprived of all option. Moreover, whereas the slavery law admitted of emancipation, untouchability knew no such escape. "Once an Untouchable always an Untouchable." The other difference is that untouchability is an indirect and therefore the worst form of slavery.

Possessed of an uncommonly sharp and logical mind capable of making fine distinctions between one object and another, he examines the two systems from different angles and notices to his great shock that the system of untouchability reduced a human being to the position of a chattel and that being indirect it was 'the worst form of slavery'. In the chapter called 'Slaves and Untouchables',<sup>5</sup> he also notes that while in the slavery system the slave was conscious of his enslavement—the first and most important step in the battle for freedom—in the system of untouchability in which a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly he has no awareness of his enslavement. "Untouchability is an indirect form of slavery. To tell an Untouchable 'you are free, you are a citizen, you have all the rights of a citizen', and to tighten the rope in such a way as to leave him no opportunity to realize the ideal is a cruel deception. It is enslavement without making the Untouchables conscious of their enslavement. It is slavery though it is untouchability."<sup>6</sup>

Bhim experienced many iniquities in his youth, iniquities that sank deeper into his consciousness than are apt to appear to the outside world. He experienced all the disadvantages of an unfree social order and had neither equal opportunities nor square deals. Being observant to an extraordinary degree, he must have seen how the untouchables lived in separate quarters away from the habitation of the privileged Hindus—a phenomenon which he recorded in his writings later. It was therefore no surprise to him to find his castemen observing the rule of 'distance pollution of shadow of pollution'. The schoolgoing boy must have been told that the untouchable community must not acquire wealth, such as land or cattle, nor must it build a house with tiled roof. What must have shocked him most was that the members of his community were not entitled to wear clean dresses and shoes, nor were they expected to put on watches or gold ornaments. To this catalogue were added a few more offences:

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to give high sounding names to their children. Their names be such as to indicate contempt.

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu.

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to ride on a horse or a palanquin through the village.

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community not to salute a Hindu.

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to speak a cultured language.

It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community, if he happens to come into the village on a sacred day which the Hindus treat as the day of fast and at or about the time of the breaking of fast, to go about speaking, on the ground that their breath is held to foul the air and the food of the Hindus.

It is an offence for an Untouchable to wear the outward marks of a Touchable and pass himself as a Touchable.

An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as

- (a) having a contemptible name;
- (b) not wearing clean clothes;
- (c) not having tiled roof;
- (d) not wearing silver and gold ornaments.<sup>7</sup>

Between periods of crippling humiliations and disabilities, Bhim continued his studies, 'cultivating a spirit of patience in the school of experience'. He was indisputably intelligent and sensitive. Many of his admirers speak of him as 'a man of abounding fortitude' and refer to his burning hatred for Hinduism as the result of the insulting refusals and maltreatment which he experienced in youth. Less devout research mentions his prejudices and dismisses his writings as so many vituperative outpourings born of hysteria mingled with bad temper. But objective scrutiny reveals the untenability of such a judgement. He was from the beginning fearless, defiant and intensely pugnacious. He was preoccupied with liberty, personal, social and religious, at an unusually early age. Some of his close associates remembered him later as somewhat supercilious and disdainful of the high-caste Hindus, of all forms and manifestations of casteocracy. None could question him without inviting an opposition or a challenge when he decided to do a thing. None could behave



like a dictator to the boy or impose his will upon him. Challenges, however dangerous, were readily acceptable to him, so much so that he often staked his life in facing them, never giving the impression that he was weak-willed or irresolute. As he grew older, other traits became apparent: stubbornness, intense pride and equally intense love of justice and propriety. Sensitive about his being a segregated untouchable, he developed, as a result, an absolutely hardened attitude towards brahmanism in later years. In due course, owing to his uncanny grasp of law and constitutional matters, he became a much-demanded young man about town. He did not fail to play up to his role.

The story of how Bhim Rao Ramji<sup>8</sup> became Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar is not only interesting; it also reveals an aspect of his character with which his contemporaries are familiar. We are told that 'Ambedkar' was the surname of a brahman teacher in the high school where Bhim was a student. He loved Bhim and very often offered him boiled rice, chapatis and vegetables during the recess. Though Bhim's family name was Sakpal, the brahman teacher changed the boy's surname in the school records. Bhim Rao Ramji now became Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar. Being obedient and obliging, he ungrudgingly acquiesced to the change.

One of the things he never forgot was the kindness and affection with which he was treated by this teacher during his school days. He also remembered the letter of congratulation which this schoolmaster had addressed him on the eve of his departure for the first session of the Round Table Conference.

But Bhim's school teachers were not all alike. Some orthodox ones with hardened hearts and closed eyes refused to show any sympathy to him and his brother; they refused even to touch his notebooks. They thought that the touch would pollute them or that the presence of the boys—the untouchables—was a kind of medicinal asafoetida for their pudding-stomach. Oblivious of their duties as teachers, these know-nothings with academic pretensions would not ask Bhim and his brother to recite poems or put questions to them all 'for fear of being polluted'. When thirsty, none would allow them to touch the watercans nor pour out water into their mouths.

Such iniquities were not uncommon. But Bhim had inherited the pride and spirit of his Mahar ancestors and was perhaps

aware of the phrase *dharniche put*—sons of the soil—used for the community which, according to a popular theory, consisted of the original inhabitants of Maharashtra. His father or a village elder might have informed him that some of the traditional village duties of the Mahars were the arbitration of boundary disputes and the care of the village goddess Mariai and that they may at one time have owned the land. But as time passed, the Mahars performed their duties only in the context of their untouchability. A Mahar's touch, says Eleanor Zelliot, "was polluting and he did not come into direct contact with a caste Hindu or enter a caste Hindu home. The temple, the school, the village well were closed to him. Some restrictions in clothing, ornaments, metal house-hold wares and the observance of ceremonies seem to have been enforced. The Mahar role in village festivals was clearly specified and generally, though not always, indicative of his inferior status. The Mahar practice of eating the carrion beef of the carcasses which were his charge, and early target of the Mahar reformers, was justification, in the mind of the caste Hindu, for his untouchability."<sup>9</sup>

With the establishment of the British rule, the Mahars had new opportunities for work open to them. Their position as 'inferior village servants'—an expression used by the British—lost significance with new modes of communication, justice and Government. They were replaced in the post offices, the courts and the police as messengers, arbitrators of land disputes, and watchmen. In 'Learning the Use of Political Means' Zelliot adds: "The system of *balutedar* work itself could not expand to care for increasing numbers of Mahars. Work on the docks, the railways and the roads, in textile mills, and in government industries such as ammunition factories became outlets for Mahar labour, from the 1860s on. Although Mahars evidently did not flock to the cities in as great numbers as did other castes (even now the percentage of urban Mahars including Buddhists is lower than the urban percentage for Maharashtra as a whole), the railway centres and the mill towns, as well as Bombay, Poona and Nagpur, became the loci for a new Mahar push for education and improved social status. Major consequences followed such an exposure. Stimulated through contact with city relatives or the travelling of Mahar propa-

gandists and entertainers, those Mahars remaining in the village began to discard both duties and caste practices that were associated with their low status: the dragging out of the carcasses and the subsequent eating of carrion, begging for food, wearing the clothes of the dead. Eventually, under Dr. Ambedkar's leadership, the *watan-balutedar* system itself was attacked."<sup>10</sup>

Most of the historians, Indian and Western alike, have woe-fully noted how the plight of the *śūdras* has remained unchanged down the ages. From the earliest times this handicapped sector of the Hindus has suffered privation, ostracization, and unapproachability due to rigid caste structures and inviolable social codes and sacred institutes. The *śūdras* in ancient India and those today are socially not different from one another. That there is no essential difference between the account of the *śūdras* given by R.S. Sharma in *Śūdras in Ancient India* and that given by Sophie Baker in *Caste: At Home in Hindu India*, a book first published in 1991, cannot be gainsaid. Describing the social position of the *śūdras* in the pre-Mauryan period, Prof. Sharma refers, in the first place, to the lawgivers who emphasized the much-debated old fiction that the *śūdras* were born from the feet of God which imposed on them on this basis numerous social disabilities with regard to company, food, marriage and education. These social disabilities amounted in fact to the social boycott of the *śūdras* by the higher *varnas*. "It was laid down by Budhaya-*na*," Dr. Sharma adds, "that a *snātaka* should not go on a journey with outcastes, a woman or with a *śūdra*. Haradatta's comment on a passage of Gautama states that the term *snātaka* here means a *brāhmaṇa* or a *kṣatriya*, which implies that the rule did not apply to the *vaiśya*. Again, one of the rites essential for securing success was that the student desiring it should not talk to women and *śūdras*. All association with the outcaste (*patita*), who is defined as the son begotten by a *śūdra* on a female of an unequal caste (evidently higher), was considered undesirable. These were obviously meant to reduce opportunities of social contact between the *śūdra* and the higher *varnas*. In this respect the Dharmasūtras exhibit a clear tendency to widen the social distance between the *brāhmaṇa* and the *śūdra*. Āpastamba and Baudhāyana hold that, if a *śūdra* comes as a guest to a *brāhmaṇa*, he should be given some work to do and may be fed

after the work had been performed. He should not be fed and received by the brāhmaṇa, but by his slaves, who should fetch rice from the royal stores for this purpose.”<sup>11</sup> Prof. Sharma goes on to quote the views of Gautama, according to whom a non-brāhmaṇa was not permitted to accept the hospitality of a brāhmaṇa, except on the occasion of a sacrifice. Even on such occasions the vaiśyas and śūdras were to be with the servants of the brāhmaṇa *for mercy's sake*.

Such and other details prove beyond doubt that the śūdras had little opportunities of social contact. Earlier in his account Prof. Sharma shows how the śūdra varṇa had ceased to have any place in administration and that it was not only excluded from administrative appointments but also subjected to corporal punishments for minor offences. In a way, observes Dr. Sharma, “this was natural, for they could not generally afford to pay fines. The penalties laid down by the rules of penances and criminal law in respect of the śūdras are indeed proportionately much higher than those prescribed for offences committed by the higher varṇas.”

Sophie Baker who went to live with a harijan family in Bihar, met with the same caste prejudices and entrenched codes of conduct that hold around 800 million souls in thrall. She sketches a typical harijan, Ramashray, who had the same haunting sense of untouchability as Ambedkar. Sophie Baker makes him her mouthpiece and draws the following picture which, as we pointed out earlier, resembles all that has been said about the social pariahs ever since their caste was born from the lower limbs of Brahma.

“ ‘One feels one's Untouchability most of the time. I've never shared a meal with caste Hindus and I would never draw water from their well.' Some of our children do study with theirs but they rarely play together after school. My father used to warn me not to let my shadow fall on a Brahmin. I think perhaps in my subconscious I'm careful in the presence of the high castes, certainly not out of respect but perhaps instinctively. We feel both used and abused by them. I would always avoid my confrontation because then I wouldn't get the work I need to sustain my family. I certainly wouldn't go into the house of one unless invited and I've noticed how sometimes they spray water in my

path before I enter. It's insulting, but something one gets used to.

“‘There is definitely a division between our community and the rest of the village. Fortunately I've never been at the receiving end, although I have seen my neighbours suffering. Recently a barber fell in love with a Kshatriya girl. He was killed by her brothers, but his family were too frightened to inform the police.’

“‘More atrocities were committed in the name of caste in this state than in any other in the whole of India, perhaps an indication that racial tension and police harassment erupted more often in an atmosphere of basic deprivation.

“‘I think caste violence is a terrible thing’, he continued. ‘Some people here have radios, and they tell us about it, but it baffles me. Why should our communities always be the ones to suffer? We Harijans are good people. We care for our families and each other. It's the bullying landlords who create the tensions. I don't really understand them. Maybe they are afraid when Harijans unite. They're just cowards and bullies.’”<sup>12</sup>

Sophie Baker's experience narrated here confirms that caste Hindus still persist in treating the downgraded outcastes and Antyajas as so many sub-humans and pariahs. That is how Bhim's teachers in those pre-independence days treated him in the classroom and outside, exhibiting, expectedly, their casteist mentality in the name of varna purity and never concurring that he was made of the same clay as they themselves, if not of a superior stuff.

Was Bhim devoted to his studies with any care and love? According to the record, he was not. While at school he gravitated to the games and strangely enough to gardening, by which he was fascinated for some time, but he found this an expensive hobby. Soon he gave up gardening and applied himself to tending cattle and rearing goats. Commenting on these early years of his life, he observed that he actually did some *hamal* work at Satara station. His aunt felt humiliated at this demeaning conduct of his, but she loved him so much that she had no heart to punish him.

At nine Bhim, too playful to bother with studies, cared more for holidays than for books. There is a reason for his truancy.

His father had married a second time. To Bhim, who looked upon this whole episode as extremely sordid, hated his step-mother 'for wearing his mother's ornaments'. He, therefore, decided, almost by instinct, that he must not depend upon his father for maintenance. His sisters had told him that quite a few Satara boys had short employment in the Bombay mills. Bhim could do the same and work like them in those mills. Bhim, however, was too impoverished to travel to Bombay. "Should he then borrow or commit theft?" he said to himself. He planned to steal his aunt's purse. How he had to struggle with himself to abandon this idea is thus recorded: "For three successive nights I tried to remove the purse tucked up at the waist of my aunt, but without success. On the fourth night I did get hold of the purse, but to my disappointment I found only half an anna in it. And in half an anna, of course, I could not go to Bombay. The four nights' experience was so nerve-racking that I gave up the idea of collecting money in this shameful manner and I came to another decision—a decision that gave an entirely different turn to my life. I decided that I must study hard and get through my examinations as fast as possible, so that I might earn my own livelihood and be independent of my father."<sup>13</sup> That was a crucial moment in the life of the boy, a real turning point which suddenly changed the course of his life and so transformed him that he abandoned all profligacy and vagrancy and vowed quite solemnly not to waste his time. Another vow he took was that he would be diligent in his studies and would never waste even a moment in pursuit of useless activities. Thereafter his teachers, who were disappointed in him at first, advised his father to give his son the best possible education.

Yet another change in Bhim's life was already in the offing. His father, Ramji, moved his children to Bombay where the family lived in a small dingy room situated in the labour area having an environment not different from that of the underworld. His daughters, already married, also lived in Bombay. Anxious to get his sons the best possible education, Ramji did not leave them behind in the village. The sons were admitted into Maratha High School where Bhim acquitted himself creditably, making considerable progress in his studies. Writing on the achievement of the boy during these years, his biographer, Dhananjay Keer,

says: "Under his father Bhim did the Howard's English Reader and the three famous translation books by Tarkhadkar. Bhim was well grounded in translation exercises, and he had now attained knowledge of English better than most of his classmates. This particular method of translation adopted by his father, he gratefully once observed, made him ransack his memory for equivalent terms, increased his vocabulary and laid the foundation on which he could subsequently build up his fame as a front-rank author of India."<sup>14</sup>

Bhim read avidly, first under his father's tutorship and then under the tutorship of his learned teachers and university professors. It was during these early years that he displayed yet another remarkable quality: his almost extraordinary love of books, of books prescribed by the school authorities and of those not prescribed by them. The latter kind included those edifying ones which were borrowed from the local libraries. He was, even at that age, sufficiently well-equipped to study those books and, at about nineteen or twenty, to use his knowledge in exploring and learning the history of the various castes. His special interests were encouraged by his schoolmasters, so that he distinguished himself in all the examinations he took then and even later. These aided his entrance into Elphinstone High School which is said to have been one of the best institutions in Bombay. Family finances were such that he could not buy the books he wanted, but his father "ungrudgingly supplied him with new books, borrowing money from his two married daughters on most of the occasions and at times even pawning their ornaments..."<sup>15</sup> He was justified in his belief that this son of his would one day become as great as Tilak and Savarkar, who, too, were known for their passion for reading in their youth.

Bhim's outstanding academic ability and liking for books led him to become a popular boy, but he did not prevent his classmates and other students from humiliating him from time to time. Even in this 'government institute' the atmosphere was charged with casteist segregationism, with 'the same prejudices and the same hatreds' as were noticeable in 'the vast insulting world outside'. An incident recorded by Keer in his biography of Ambedkar sheds light on the inhuman humiliations experienced by the boy in this period. It is said that when he was

called upon by his class teacher to come to the blackboard to solve a given problem, there was an uproar in protest, they all shouting with derision of the untouchable who, they feared, would pollute their tiffin-boxes kept behind the blackboard. The turmoil witnessed on that occasion came to an end only after the boys had rushed to the blackboard and rescued their tiffin-boxes from Bhim's so-called polluting touch. Just a little later, one of the teachers most conscious of his pedagogic ability, counselled Bhim to give up his studies, for it was, he said, 'useless for him to receive instruction'. This ill-timed advice so irked Bhim that he lost his temper and exploded that the teacher should better mind his own business! He had little realized that the boy would fire up.

During all these years of his school life in Bombay, Bhim "lived in the same one-room tenement in the old chawl at Parel. There was no chance for the provision of a study, and the possibility of employing a tutor was beyond a dream. The small room was full of domestic articles and utensils. It was smoky and crowded. Firewood was stored above head and also in one corner, and in the other corner was the fireplace. The room served as a kitchen, a parlour, a lying-in room, a study—all in one!"<sup>16</sup> It was here that the foundations of Bhim's later-year achievements were laid and his kinsfolk were made to realize that the boy's genius was gradually flowering as his father had expected it to do. Devoted to his studies, he displayed at this time an efflorescence uncommon in the boys of the school. This particular instance of Bhim's achievement and exhibition of rare gifts is being mentioned because, despite the humiliations experienced now and again, he did not let his genius be nipped in the bud. He was slighted, insulted and subjected to all kinds of agonisingly painful treatment, and yet, drawing inspiration from his father, the sapling developed into a sturdy shady tree whose protecting branches provided succour to them who stood in need of it.

As Bhim lived among workers and artisans, he got to know their problems and the hardships they had to face. If to them life was not a bed of roses, to Bhim it was equally beset with problems which often threatened to disrupt his studies. Before long, however, he learnt to combat them and devote himself



heart and soul to his studies or to the robust games he played. At school he often played cricket and football, preferring them to other outdoor games, and had many an opportunity to captain his teams. The games helped in developing fellow-feeling, a sense of joint responsibility, and a sound body to house a sound mind. He had his frugal meals at school itself, meals that consisted of chapatis and vegetables carried to him by a workman who had to attend to his job in the Fort area. He was fast growing into an able-bodied young boy, full of zeal, a hard-working student with an expressive animated face. It was this indwelling zest for life that brought him success in all the examinations he took. Coupled with this zest was no doubt hard work and sincere application.

However, combating narrow casteism and arriving at a deeper understanding of the problems arising from untouchability, to which even students were subjected, were no easy tasks. The way Bhim and his brother were treated by upper-caste boys and even by some of the teachers presented a considerable hindrance. Though some of them played a progressive role, most of them were still loony, reactionary and parochial in their outlook, a characteristic which they exhibited by not allowing Bhim and his brother to study Sānskrit, the language which held the key to the Vedas. Being sūdras and outcastes, they were expected not to touch the sacred books accessible only to the brāhmaṇs and the members of the other privileged castes. The sūdra was prohibited from acquiring knowledge lest he should keep a steady vigil regarding his interest.<sup>17</sup> On account of the Chaturvarnya, he could receive no education. He could not think out or know the way to his salvation. He had no entry in the higher arts of civilization and no way open to a life of culture.<sup>18</sup> He must only sweep. He must do nothing else. Untouchability carried no security as to livelihood. None from the Hindus was responsible for the feeding, housing and clothing of the untouchable. The health of the untouchable was the care of nobody. Indeed, the death of an untouchable was regarded as a good riddance. There is a Hindu proverb which says: "The Untouchable is dead and the fear of pollution has vanished."<sup>19</sup> Withdrawing into orthodoxy, the exponents of Hinduism like Tilak described a Hindu as one who believed in the holiness of the *Vedas*, "but the

pity of it was that seventy per cent of the Hindus were forbidden to study, much less to listen to the *Vedas*! Yet these very leaders read with appreciative and gesticulating looks and studied as never before the treatises on the *Vedas* by foreigners who belonged to different religions! Poor Bhim and his brother were torn asunder from Sanskrit by the Brahmin teachers as was also done in the case of Dr. M. R. Jayakar in his school days and were compelled to take Persian against their will. This was another pill of poison that was rammed down the unwilling throats of the two Hindu boys by the defenders of Hinduism! Had these so-called defenders of Hinduism fought with the aggressive forces of other religions with the same degree of bigotry and fanaticism, they would have at least not been humiliated in their own land!"<sup>20</sup>

Both Bhim and his father had expected that Elphinstone High School would be free from the hateful system of caste—the ever-present shadow of Untouchability'. They received one of the rudest shocks of their lives when Bhim was not allowed to study Sanskrit. He had, therefore, to study Persian much against his will. But by that time Bhim had come firmly to believe that nothing of any value is achieved without a consistent struggle against odds. He carried, as it were, a recipe for the realization of heaven on earth and for mastering a language which his teachers forbade him to study. His "unconquerable will enabled him to become a scholar of high calibre in Sanskrit, the very language he was forbidden to learn in his school days."<sup>21</sup>

Among Bhim's early academic achievements must be reckoned his brilliant success at the matriculation examination, which he passed in 1907, scoring the highest marks in Persian. His biographers regard this achievement as something spectacular, for it was 'a milestone in the history of the Untouchables of India'. That explains why the event was celebrated by the community with a fanfare, and a special meeting was held under the presidentship of a Maharashtrian social reformer, S. K. Bole, to congratulate the boy. The late Sri K. A. Keluskar, a well-known social reformer and Marathi scholar of those years, was also present on the occasion. He was an assistant teacher at the Wilson High School, Bombay, and had met Bhim quite often 'in a garden where both of them spent long hours in studying' (sic).

Keluskar, it is said, "became so fond of Bhim that he not only permitted him to borrow extensively from his wide collection of books, but also presented him a copy of his own book entitled *Life of Gautama Buddha*. It would be accurate to say that this book had a great impact on the mind of Bhim, and prepared him for his ultimate conversion to Buddhism."<sup>22</sup>

Bhim was compelled, thanks to the customs of those days, to marry soon after passing the High School examination. In the family circle, there was jubilation; the arrival of the bride was greeted with a parade of great rejoicing by the trumpeters. But Bhim was now shackled, though his spirit was still free. Nothing, not even his young wife, could distract him from his studies. It is important to remember that when Bhim was married, he was only a little over sixteen and his bride, Rami, was hardly nine. After marriage, Rami assumed a new name, Ramabai.

Insatiably thirsty for knowledge, Bhim did not in any way slacken his interest in books. Guided and inspired by his father, he continued his studies with the same unremitting zeal. He knew even at that tender age that knowledge is the source of all power and that a life of slothful ease is the main culprit of all human disasters. Though married, he did not violate any of his cherished principles nor abandon his interest in the languages. The volcano was only beginning to simmer.

Now, with his intensified hunger for knowledge, Bhim joined the Elphinstone College, Bombay. As before, he studied hard, but misfortune 'continued to dog his footsteps'. He did not have a moment to waste, not a minute of what others called personal pleasure—life moved on relentlessly, but its whirling and roaring suddenly stopped. The boy had no money to continue his education, though he had passed only the Intermediate examination. Summarizing the events of these years, M. L. Shahare states: "...luck was in his favour. His old well-wisher, K. A. Keluskar, having come to know of Bhim's difficulties, personally approached the then Maharaja of Baroda, His Highness Sir Sayajirao Gackwad, a noble-hearted and broad-minded ruler. The Maharaja of Baroda had made an announcement some time earlier, at a meeting in Bombay offering his help to any worthy untouchable who wanted to pursue higher studies. At the request of Keluskar, the Maharaja of Baroda called Bhim, asked

him some searching questions and having been completely satisfied with his replies, assured him of financial help for pursuing higher studies. Bhim was granted a scholarship of Rs. 25 per month, which was quite a big amount of money in those days.

"After that, Bhim was able to pursue his studies without any distraction. Also, this financial assistance enabled the family to move into a two-room apartment in Parel, Bombay. Bhim was given a room of his own where he could study in peace while the other room was occupied by the other members of the family. He passed his B.A. examination in 1913.

"After having passed his B.A. examination, Bhim was selected for the post of Lieutenant in the Baroda State's Army. However, fate again intervened. He received a telegram in January 1913 hardly a fortnight after joining the service, that his father was critically ill in Bombay. His love for his father gained the upper hand over his own worldly interests and he immediately left for Bombay. On reaching Bombay the next day, he found that his father was dying. On that fateful day, February 2, 1913, Bhim was practically inconsolable. He had seen his brave father wage a struggle to survive in a hostile world. However, it seems that Ex-Subedar Ramji must have passed on to his favourite son, Bhim, his own indomitable will to conquer adversities, when he put his hand on his son's back before passing away from this world."<sup>23</sup>

This is just a drab distilled summary of the events leading to the death of Bhim's father, Ramji. His passing away and the agonizing experiences attendant on it tended to discourage the fast-growing young Mahar who was also sensitive to the social stigma that had come to be attached to him because of his birth in a community of untouchables. He gave up working for the Baroda State. One does not know what indeed would have been his ultimate destiny if this had not happened. It is likely that he would have remained in the service of the State (of Baroda) and might, in all probability, have gradually risen to the highest possible office—the Primeministership of the State. Those were the days, however, when such an attainment was 'beyond the wildest dreams of an untouchable'. But history had willed that Bhim should play a much greater role and contribute to his countrymen something of lasting social and religious value, than whom none in the present century had contributed more.

He had now to stand on his own feet. Armed with exemplary fortitude and an irrepressible courage and forbearance he now proceeded to satisfy his thirst for knowledge and was now in no mood to serve the State of Baroda where his brief stay was by no means happy. In June 1913, the Maharaja of Baroda, Sayajirao, announced that he would send some deserving students to the U.S.A. for higher studies at Columbia University at the State's expenses. As soon as Bhim heard this announcement, he met the Maharaja in his palace in Bombay. He requested him to give him an opportunity to make what Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer calls 'a quantum jump in education'. The Maharaja on his part advised the young scholar to apply for one of the scholarships advertised by his State. With luck on his side, Bhim received the scholarship he had applied for. The Maharaja, himself avid for book-learning, decided to send Bhim and three other students for higher education. On June 4, 1913 the four scholars selected for the award had to sign an agreement in the presence of the Deputy Minister for education of the State, expressing their willingness to devote their entire period of stay in the U.S.A. to studying the prescribed subjects and then to serve the State for ten years after the completion of their studies at Columbia University.

Having learned from many sources and schooled himself in various ways, Bhim was ready for the new adventure. It was his passion for knowledge, not only for visiting a new country or for departing for newer and lusher, not to say greener, pastures in the United States, that he prepared himself for the journey. It was certainly a turning point in his life which "opened undreamt of vistas of opportunity and experience in a country which upheld the basic principles of equal opportunity for everybody. It is a common knowledge that North America which was a colony of the British in the late eighteenth century waged a historic struggle for independence under the leadership of great men like George Washington. The subsequent battle for abolition of slavery of the American Negroes in which men of vision like Abraham Lincoln [distinguished themselves] was a great event in world history. The United States of American (sic) emerged into a powerful, united and truly liberal and democratic State out of these turmoils and the Statue of Liberty on the New

York Harbour today came to symbolise the principles of 'Freedom, Equality and Fraternity' for which this new nation stood for (sic). The world had not come out of the spell cast by people like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and the great Negro leader, Booker T. Washington. America was in those days truly a land of dreams. Bhim Rao arrived in New York in the third week of July 1913 with tremendous hope and fervour in his heart. After moving from one lodging to another in the initial period, he finally settled down at the Livingstone Hall dormitory with Naval Bhathena, a Parsi student from Bombay. It was here that Bhim and Naval struck a life-long friendship."<sup>24</sup>

Dhananjay Keer describes this as 'an event of enormous magnitude for an Untouchable'. To Bhim's biographer and to Bhim himself, this was certainly 'an epoch-making event'. What added to its importance was that a young Mahar, an untouchable and 'abominable' aspirant, was going to the States 'to cultivate the best, the enduring and the ennobling influence and imbibe the spirit of the age'. It goes without saying that Bhim was among the first to receive instruction in the land of Lincoln and Washington. The late Jay Prakash Narayan was the other to study abroad—in South America in the early thirties.

On his arrival in New York he stayed at the Hartley Hall, the University dormitory, for a week. As the majority of the dishes were badly cooked and consisted of beef, Bhim did not like them. He, therefore, shifted to a Cosmopolitan Club at 554 West, 114 Street, where some of the Indian students lived. After that he shifted to Livingstone Hall Dormitory, where he stayed with the Parsi student, Naval Bhathena.

From the very start Bhim was convinced that he had gone to the United States to study and learn. It is better, he believed, to understand than to conquer, better to know than to possess. He met the common American, and found him a worthy sort, far better than some of his Indian friends had represented him; and he began to feel a slight sympathy with this clear and vibrant air, this bluff and jolly friendship, this *camaraderie* of his classmates in New York, this gigantic turbulent transformation of a wilderness into a civilization. This growing and flourishing life, extending gayly its empire over nature rather than over men,

seized his imagination as an epic thing. After all, he thought, there was something noble in this effort to subdue the planet, to take out of it all its hidden wealth, so that even the poorest might have comfort, security, and schools. Indian filth, poverty and disease, Hindu pictism and casteism, the brahmins' idle contemplation in the face of their people's suffering and ignorance—were these higher than America's courageous resolve to destroy poverty and ignorance even at the cost of inward peace? Perhaps out of all this disorderly Becoming new and higher levels of Being would emerge than ever before. Which form of existence, Bhim asked himself, is to be preferred, the Indian or the American? "May I express my preference? I am already no longer biased, for I can speak and move freely; I can read and write; I can walk and bathe and rest with a status of equality. Already I want to grow, to become, to create, perform, perfect again. Life here—at Columbia University is a revelation. It is a new world. It enlarges one's mental horizon. A new chapter has opened. My life now gleams with a new significance."

In a letter addressed to one of his father's friends he reveals the working of his mind and describes how earnestly he desired the uplift of the downtrodden, hungry masses and how 'he liked to see many more men of the latter's reforming spirit in the community'. Having diagnosed the malady from which his community was suffering, he makes the following suggestion:

"We must now," he reveals, "entirely give up the idea that parents give birth—'Janma'—to the child and not destiny—'Karma'. They can mould the destiny of the children; and if we but follow this principle, be sure that we shall soon see better days and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is pursued side by side with the female education the fruits of which you can very well see verified in your own daughter."

In his initial reaction to the American scene, Bhim did not notice its ethnic colours and constituents—Indians, Negroes, and Whites. Nor did he see how the Indians had degenerated since they were no longer allowed to wage war. Though extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive, he did not care to observe that the Whites in America were not yet a people; they were really a

selection from the various peoples of Europe, and were hardly more one here than there.

It was not necessary for Bhim to observe what was irrelevant to his purpose, to his studies and to his academicism. As long as he was in the United States, he could move, think and act like any free citizen with no stigma of untouchability attached to him. One of his earliest realizations here was that if all were socially and economically secure all would be happy and if there were no poor people there would be no crime. Another was that knowledge was, and is, power and that to be powerful, one must work and study hard. Only then can we become ideal citizens who are not poisoned by parochialism and the filths of various kinds of separatism, and establish a society based on humanist justice, a society free from feudal-colonial 'caste-culture and medieval structure of subordination and indignity'.

Bhim was set apart from other men not only by his intelligence and versatility but also by the extreme intensity of his awareness of good and evil and his deep sense of duty. His conscience gave him no rest and prevented him from compromising even for an instant with the order of elements in the world around him. We are made to realize that Bhim was from the beginning a man of strong determination, that he had resolved not to waste a single moment of his stay in the States, and that he was so dedicated to his duty that one marvels at his sincerity, at his perseverance and at his love of knowledge for its own sake. While in the U.S.A. Ambedkar found a rare opportunity, unique for a Mahar, to find an inexhaustible treasure trove of knowledge lying before his eyes. He could draw upon it at will and slake his thirst for knowledge.

At Columbia University in New York, which he joined in the third week of July 1913, he fell under the stimulating influence of the University's greats—John Dewey, Charles Beard, Boas, Seligman, Monroe and others. It was then that "he became absorbed in ancient and modern history, anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics and signed up course after course. When he finished, he had more than double the number of credits usually (sic) required for his Degree." Of all the professors in the University, John Dewey influenced him most, for "it is said that for four years he took down every word the great



teacher uttered in his hearing. 'If Dewey died,' Ambedkar used to tell his classmates, 'I could reproduce every lecture verbatim.' Ambedkar obtained his Master's degree in 1915 for his thesis 'Ancient Indian Commerce' and later the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for his thesis 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India', which was an amplification of his earlier thesis 'National Dividend in India: A Historical and Analytical Study'.<sup>25</sup>

Having completed his studies in the United States, the young scholar came to London in July 1916 with a view to continuing his intellectual pursuit there. He had, as we have pointed out earlier, already come under the inspiring influence of men like John Dewey, the father of progressive education. It was his interest in a physiology text by T. H. Huxley, a Darwinian, that had awakened Dewey's intellectual curiosity and set him searching for answers. He read widely in the sciences before turning to philosophy to help himself resolve the conflict between science and dogma. This was the beginning of his interest in human behaviour and social progress, as opposed to abstract metaphysics. Soon his articles in scholarly journals stamped him as a rising young philosopher. The University of Michigan invited him to head their department, and there he continued to add to his reputation until, in 1894, he was brought to the University of Chicago to supervise the combined departments of psychology, philosophy, and education. Since he had attained eminence in all three fields, he was the ideal choice for this coveted position.

It was at Chicago that Dewey had organised the famous Experimental or Laboratory School. There he had revolutionized pedagogy, turning his back on the classical, authoritarian methods and instituting a curriculum based on experience as the ultimate authority. Book after book by John Dewey had appeared in the ensuing years, and most of them had been translated so that his influence was felt abroad as well. From 1904 until his retirement in 1930 he was a professor of philosophy at Columbia University. During those years he was in great demand as America's unofficial intellectual ambassador, visiting China, Japan, South Africa, Mexico, Russia (where he praised the educational reforms of Lenin and Trotsky), and Turkey. He followed his own precepts by taking an active part in civic

movements and in trying to improve his world. If one glances through the newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s, one will find daily references to Dewey's activities. He was organizing the Teachers' Guild, signing petitions for prison reform, protesting the injustices in the Sacco-Vanzetti case, helping to found the American Civil Liberties Union, supporting the socialist Norman Thomas in his presidential campaigns, warning the world about the dangerous growth of fascism, and meeting with politicians who could aid education in America.

Ironically, Dewey himself was a poor teacher. He would enter the lecture hall and begin musing out loud about a problem he had been facing. Irwin Edman, who took Dewey's courses at Columbia, thought it miraculous "that so dull a lecturer could have influenced so many students." Oliver Wendell Holmes has provided us with a memorable description of Dewey's oral delivery: "So, methought, God would have spoken had He been inarticulate, but keenly desirous to tell you how it was."

Another formative influence on Ambedkar was that of Prof. Seligman, a well-known economist, who was his teacher. It was by dint of hard work that in June 1915 he took his M.A. degree in Economics for which he had submitted a dissertation on 'Ancient Indian Commerce'. A year later, in May 1916, he read a paper on 'The Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', at the Anthropology Seminar sponsored by Dr. A. A. Goldenweizer. It was subsequently published in the *Indian Antiquary* in May 1917 and also in the form of a brochure, the first published work of Ambedkar. The paper highlights the view 'that endogamy is the essence of castes'. A caste, said Ambedkar, is an enclosed class and it existed before Manu whom he describes as an 'audacious person, a dare-devil'. Ambedkar then adds: "Manu simply codified the existing caste rules." Again in 1916 he read a paper, 'Responsibilities of Provincial Government in India'. The great nationalist leader, Lala Lajpat Rai, known for his rare patriotism, was then an exile in America. It is said that he often went to the college library where Ambedkar used to study. On enquiry he discovered that this Indian student was a Mahar, an untouchable. As Lalajee was as radical in social reforms as he was radical in politics, this discovery made little difference, and their conversation continued

to centre round the national struggle for independence in which the whole country was then involved.

In June 1916, Ambedkar submitted his thesis for the degree of Ph.D. This doctoral study was aptly entitled *National Dividend for India: A Historical and Analytical Study*.<sup>26</sup> He was the first Mahar to obtain such a degree and to achieve recognition for his exceptional abilities. His talent, his lack of similarity to his Indian contemporaries, his brimming strength of spirit and resolute searching for knowledge—all this suggested to the authorities of Columbia University that Ambedkar deserved the doctoral degree for which he had worked so hard. It was clear to them that there was something extraordinary about this scholar, something that would not let him stop, something that impelled him ceaselessly to go on and on in his intellectual development and search for knowledge, in his eternal pursuit of academic enlightenment and a total understanding of the subject. Ambedkar had devoted himself entirely to the service of economics and remained true to his ideals ('sincere devotion to one's duty', 'complete mastery of the subject', 'hard work', etc.) which he used to repeat very often to his classmates.

Unlike Faust, Ambedkar seems to have borne Mephistopheles within himself—he was always the most merciless critic of his own writings and applied his dictum 'subject every statement you make to doubt' first and foremost to the works of his own pen. That is why the original doctoral thesis was subjected to revision in the light of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. Ambedkar dedicated this first important work to Maharaja Sayajirao and had the introduction written by Professor S.A. Seligman, who was aware of the labour which had gone into the making of the book. He knew that Ambedkar's reading of relevant literature was never the passive process of the student, but merely an occasion and impetus, a stimulus to independent, original thought. "Nowhere to my knowledge," observed Prof. Seligman, "has such a detailed study of the underlying principles made." Ambedkar had indeed got through a whole mountain of special literature and related books on the British commercial and industrial policy. The actual volume alone of what he read in one year is quite astounding. "In the thesis Ambedkar stated that the whole policy was dictated by the interests of British

industries and manufacturers. He concluded that in every country there is social oppression and social injustice. This does not mean that the country should be without political power. This book was so indispensable that during the budget session, Indian Legislators used this as a reference book, and to students it was a guide. When he was called to give evidence before the Hilton-Young Commission on Indian Currency, he saw with pride that every member of the Commission had this book for reference.”<sup>27</sup>

Having left Columbia University,<sup>28</sup> Ambedkar proceeded to join the London School of Economics and Political Science as a graduate student. Once he had embarked upon the path of struggle, he was ready to battle on to the end, and it was easy for Professor Seligman to guess how far he would go in this struggle. Aware of his pupil's indomitable spirit, he did not hesitate to give him introductory letters to Professor Cannan and Sydney Webb. Another significant event of the year<sup>29</sup> was Ambedkar's admission to Gray's Inn, London, for law. Unfortunately, however, circumstances compelled him to return to India after spending a year in London where he was working on his thesis for the M.Sc. (Econ.) degree. The discontinuance of his studies was obviously necessitated by the expiry of his scholarship, but one of the most satisfying and redeeming events of 1917 was the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) for his dissertation already submitted to Columbia University in June 1916. Having abandoned his studies in London, Ambedkar left for India, reaching Bombay on 21 August 1917. Though the tenure of the scholarship granted to him by Maharaja Sayajirao was terminated, and Ambedkar found himself helpless in an inhuman world where man is ruled by forces alien to him, he did not plunge himself in any vale of tears nor seek consolation in illusory dreams of getting a lucrative employment outside the State of Baroda. On the other hand he tried to persuade the Maharaja to reconsider his decision to annul the scholarship which was offered to him by the State. Unsuccessful in his efforts, he then sought permission of the University of London to resume his studies within a period not exceeding four years from October 1917. The supplication, strongly supported by Prof. Cannan, was accepted.

It was in July 1917 that Ambedkar, chosen to be groomed as

Finance Minister, was appointed Military Secretary to the Maharaja of Baroda. What is worthy of note here is that neither any accredited representative of the State received him nor did any hotel or hostel offer him a suitable accommodation. Abjectly humiliated, he sought shelter in a Parsee Dharmashala and stayed there incognito. Commenting on the treatment meted out to him as Military Secretary to the Maharaja, W.N. Kuber observes: "He received the same treatment in his office. [The] peons flung office files on his table. Drinking water was not available to him in office. All this was unbearable to him. He sent a note to the Maharaja; but the Dewan expressed his inability to do anything in the matter. Even a learned untouchable could not soften the prejudices of the caste Hindus. This mortifying treatment at the hands of caste Hindus compelled him to leave Baroda. A Professor in Baroda offered to accept him as a paying guest, but later he withdrew his offer. He left Baroda and came to Bombay in November 1917. At this time he published a brochure: *Small Holdings in India and their Remedies*."<sup>30</sup>

Other biographers have followed suit and moaned that Ambedkar's "birth as an untouchable turned everything topsy-turvy. His high academic honours could not wash the stigma of untouchability from him. He was treated by his staff and peons as a leper. They flung the bundles of papers and files at his desk. They rolled the mats when he got out to go. Moreover, he was not able to find a place to stay because of his untouchability. So he stayed in a Parsi (sic) inn. One morning Ambedkar found himself threatened by a crowd of Parsees at the inn-gate with sticks in their hands to beat him unless he left. The peons refused to serve even drinking water to him in the office. This demoralising atmosphere frustrated him. His efforts to find a suitable place for board and lodging proved in vain. He informed the Maharaja about this condition. The Maharaja asked the Dewan to do something about the matter. But the Dewan expressed his inability to do anything. The Dewan of Baroda agreed to waive the contract and Ambedkar returned to Bombay."<sup>31</sup>

Though these experiences were excruciatingly humiliating, Ambedkar came out unscathed and purified, purged of all the infirmities attendant on the vagaries of youth. It was but natural that the treatment he received from the higher echelons of

society—the uppercaste, privileged men occupying the higher rungs of the social ladder—forced him to vow: “If I fail to do away with the abominable thralldom and inhuman injustice under which the class into which I am born has been groaning, I will put an end to my life with a bullet.”<sup>32</sup>

In Bombay he was confronted with the need to earn his livelihood and to gain a deeper understanding of his people. He was beginning to understand, now very clearly, the mechanism of social relations and how social injustice is caused by the Hindu caste system or by the harshness of contemporary conditions, especially by the privileges enjoyed by the caste Hindus. It was for this reason that he began to shape his life anew. At this point a Parsee gentleman helped him become a tutor to two students. Ambedkar, now again on a tightrope financially, started a business firm, the purpose of which was to tender suggestions and advice to dealers in stocks and shares. Here again his caste caused the undoing of his firm. It suffered a premature demise, it had to be closed for good as even the most needy would not consult an untouchable on any issue whatever.

The incident, though not unexpected, scarred Ambedkar's mind. The first year after his return to Bombay witnessed him ‘in wilderness, doing odd jobs’. In November 1917 two conferences were held in Bombay and some resolutions were adopted, in the first of which “an appeal was made to [the] government to protect the interests of [thè] untouchables by granting the Depressed Classes the right to elect their own representatives to the legislatures in proportion to their population.”<sup>33</sup> Another resolution sought to support the Congress-League Scheme “with a view to impressing upon the caste Hindus the necessity of removing all disabilities imposed upon the Depressed Classes in the name of custom and religion.”<sup>34</sup> By yet another resolution passed at the other conference, the transfer of power to the caste Hindus was strongly opposed and the government was appealed to grant them the right to choose their own representatives. Ambedkar was of the view that the Congress-League Scheme had an inherent defect for the simple reason that “the Executive and Legislatures in it derived their mandates from and were responsible to different powers.”<sup>35</sup> There is no denying the fact that here, as elsewhere, he did not silence his voice raised for the uplift of

the untouchables in Hindu society. His biographers do not on this account tire of reminding us that in all "his writings, speeches, mass contacts and meetings with British bureaucracy he supported the cause of the untouchables so that their socio-economic life could be better. He felt unhappy to see the element of discrimination which greatly hindered their progress. Time and again, he threw a serious challenge to the custodians of Hindu society as well as the Raj. In this regard he sought the support and sympathy of [the] enlightened sections of our society. The task indeed was difficult, but he never felt disheartened and throughout his career he aspired for their basic rights in order to enable them to lead an honourable life."<sup>36</sup>

As we have pointed out earlier, Ambedkar's own experiences were however searing. The treatment which he had received as the Military Secretary to the Ruler was in no way gratifying. Even the office boys had refused to serve him—a man of great learning with high academic attainments—merely because he was an untouchable Mahar! Official files awaiting his scrutiny were hurled at him from a distance, just because he was an out-cast, a wretched Mahar! Nor were the gates of the hotels open to an untouchable. On occasions even force was applied to turn him out as when he entered a Parsee inn incognito. Reminiscing about them later on, he narrates how on such an occasion when he "was tired, hungry and fagged out, he sat under a tree and burst into a flood of tears," spending the night without any roof overhead. Commenting on Ambedkar's experiences on his return to Bombay, one of his biographers offers a comprehensive and convincing precis in the following words:

He returned to Bombay, grieved and frustrated. He experienced the pangs of untouchability with deep pain and anguish. If such is the fate of a person like himself, what could be the fate of millions of his brethren, who did not have the attainments he had? No wonder, this was a great challenge to Ambedkar, who had returned from abroad imbued with the progressive views of the West. He had himself seen the treatment meted out to the Negroes in America and had also learnt of the efforts made to eradicate that evil practice there. He had appreciated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Consti-

tution of the U.S.A. Ambedkar was also very much impressed by the life and work of Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee (U.S.A.)—"One of the most remarkable men America has produced, a man born in slavery but lifted by his own vision and (sic) perseverance to a position of leadership and power. The son of a slave woman, Booker T. Washington struggled to acquire an education for himself, then dedicated his life to educating others. His is a story of almost unbelievable devotion and selflessness, an inspiration to people all over the world as long as men recognize the value of courage and human dignity." How could Ambedkar escape the influence of such a silent revolution that was brought about by Booker T. Washington, about whom he had learnt so much while in America? The arrogance and inhuman treatment of the caste Hindus towards the millions of Untouchables of India, naturally, left an indelible mark on the enlightened mind of Ambedkar. No wonder, he was determined throughout his life, in whatever he did, to eradicate Untouchability. It had almost become an obsession with him. He made a quiet but firm resolve to fight this evil, tooth and nail. That was to be the 'Mission' of his life.<sup>37</sup>

On March 23 and 24 the first All India Depressed Classes Conference, presided over by Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda was held in Bombay, a conference which aimed at blotting out the slur of untouchability, for which it appealed to the conscience of the country. Tilak, known for his vision of equitable social system, declared that if God were to stand untouchability he would not recognize him. Ambedkar, however, was sceptical about those caste Hindus who had launched what seemed to be a Utopian Movement and who, often with no inconsiderable candour and sincerity, voiced sharp and striking criticisms of the evils and shortcomings of the caste system and remarkably accurate predictions about the future Hindu society without its inhibiting sanctions against the Depressed Classes.

In November 1918 Ambedkar joined Sydenham College, Bombay, as Professor of Political Economy and at once became so popular for his exceptional scholarship that students from other colleges flocked to his lectures. But he received the same



humiliating treatment from all and sundry, especially from the high-caste professors who in their overweening pride objected to his drinking water from the pot reserved for the professorial staff. Having taught in the college from November 11, 1918 to March 11, 1920, Ambedkar resigned his post to continue his studies in law and economics in London with the assistance rendered by the Maharaja of Kolhapur, Shahu Chhatrapati.

Among the notable events which took place at this point of time, the first was the examination of the representatives of different interests and communities by the Southborough Commission, the recommendations of which constituted the basis of the Montford Reforms. The Commission submitted its report on February 22, 1919. Ambedkar and V.R. Shinde were summoned to give evidence before the Southborough Commission for franchise. Ambedkar pleaded for separate electorates and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in just proportion to their population, his emphasis being on social equality before the demand for Home Rule. Armed with his conviction that Home Rule was as much the birthright of a mahar as that of a brahman, he pleaded that a marked change in the attitude of caste Hindus was the need of the hour. Obviously the non-brahman leaders were voiciferously, but unsuccessfully, demanding separate electorates. An evidence of Ambedkar's unflagging interest in championing the cause of the Depressed Classes is provided by the weekly paper *The Mooknayak*—the Leader of the Dumb—which he started on January 31, 1920. In the leader of the inaugural number he ventilated his grievance that the newspapers then in wide circulation were safeguarding the interests of certain caste leaders. "Devoid of Power and Knowledge," he maintained, "the non-Brahmins and the Depressed Classes cannot make any progress."<sup>38</sup>

Summing up Dr. Ambedkar's early career and achievements, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer says:

If we may, according to academic vogue, periodize the public life of Ambedkar, perhaps the preparatory phase of his life was 1918 to 1928 when he equipped himself in law and economics, but at Mahad led the satyagraha struggle for securing the human right of drinking water from public

lakes to untouchables and continued to battle for human dignity, equality and liberty by asking for basic facilities for fellow achuts. The second phase of life from 1929 to 1936 gave a shift in constitutional strategy for his championship of the social underdog in the bonafide, perhaps unsound, political belief that separate electorates for the untouchables would end their thralldom. For him the intractably oppressive Hindu social order could neither be broken nor bent and to quit Hinduism was the social, and to secure separate electorates, the political, hope of overthrowing the inherited burden. Followed, in the third period (1937-46), the purely political organisation of the Indian Labour Party to fight elections and be in office or opposition. His constant motivation was liberation of the down-graded dreg of the Hindu fold.<sup>39</sup>

Backed by Ambedkar, the Depressed Classes had become restive and their leaders vocal. Their conferences held at Nagpur (1918) and Kolhapur (1920) under the presidentship of Shahu Maharaja were attended among others by Ambedkar. At the conference held at Kolhapur Shahu Maharaja testified to Ambedkar's potentiality for developing into a national leader. One of the important events associated with this second conference was the intercaste dinner with which it ended. At another conference held in May 1920 Ambedkar distinguished himself by his open disparagement of V.R. Shinde and his Depressed Classes Mission launched with the support of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar. It had also won the sympathy of the Servants of India Society. It is not without significance that the Nagpur Conference of May had passed a resolution of no confidence against Shinde and others, resolutions that left no doubt in the minds of the participants about Ambedkar's unwavering faith in the correctness of his postulates. They also heard him declare that institutions and individuals had no right whatever to defend the interests of the Depressed Classes if they were not run by the untouchable themselves. Commenting on the importance of this conference, Kuber says: "This Nagpur Conference laid the foundation of Ambedkar's future work. In the articles which he wrote for his weekly paper he emphasized that the Depressed Classes were

justified in their opposition to the rule of the Brahmins in case transfer of power took place. He feared that if the protection of the British was withdrawn the caste Hindus would trample upon them. He stated that the Swaraj constitution must include fundamental rights for the Depressed Classes."<sup>40</sup>

Ambedkar's refusal to participate in social reformist movements eloquently testifies to his aversion to ameliorative programmes started by the caste Hindus. Without the leading role of the Depressed Classes, he maintained, Hinduism cannot shake off the turbid froth of casteism. He knew that the caste Hindu leaders only raised a hypocritical hue and cry without any real intention to do away with the hated system which had kept Hindu society moribund for centuries.

It was in September 1920 that he rejoined the London School of Economics and Political Science and, evincing the zeal of an intrepid and avid scholar, entered Gray's Inn to qualify as a barrister. We cannot help admiring how well he conducted himself even when stalked by poverty in a distant land and that too in a country like England. At such moments it was an Indian Raja who would come to his rescue with some financial help—Sahu Maharaja.

Not a moment was wasted and no frivolities were indulged in; the young scholar would rush immediately to the library after his frugal breakfast. He would go to the London University General Library or, having done his reading there, move to Goldsmith's Library of Economic Literature. Reading over at this library, he would trudge up towards the British (Museum) Library or the India Office Library. It is a melancholy consideration that such a versatile scholar, 'mover' and 'shaker' should have to trudge and run from one library to another even without a break for lunch. As for his abstemiousness, it may here be noted that he "resolutely avoided all kinds of diversions, such as excursions, theatres and restaurants. He asked his wife, Ramabai, to sell even ornaments if she found herself in difficulties. Many admirers voluntarily offered some help to Ramabai, but she refused to accept it."<sup>41</sup>

In June 1921 his thesis, 'Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance in British India' was accepted for the M.Sc. (Econ.) degree by the University of London. In 1922-23 he studied

economics at the University of Bonn in Germany. It was not a vain, useless venture. Ambedkar had his own way of doing things that mattered in life, with his own principles and modes of translating them into action. His diligence assured the success of his academic plans and initiative. In April 1923 therefore he could submit his thesis on 'The Problem of the Rupee: Its Origin and Its Solution' for the degree of D.Sc. (Econ.), which was subsequently published (December 1923) by P.S. King and Co., London. In the introduction, Prof. Cannan testified to Ambedkar's freshness of ideas, to his stimulating and pregnant views and to the intellectual rigour of his arguments. Prof. Cannan's introduction is an exultant proclamation of his faith in the intelligence and originality of his pupil; it is written in a style that extols Ambedkar with all the raptures of admiring and grateful enthusiasm. It is such writings that wring the reader's heart powerfully, deliciously; they teach him how to review, and how to encourage one's own promising pupil. No more significant critique would have buoyed up Ambedkar's spirit. Cannan is obviously in sympathy with a writer of genius who had worked hard, being always, whether right or wrong, transparently sincere and completely human. On his return home, Ambedkar threw himself heart and soul into the struggle for eradicating untouchability. He settled down as a barrister in Bombay, "which, he thought, would give him the means to live and provide the necessary freedom to dedicate himself to the cause of the Untouchables, of whom he formed the brightest part. Being an untouchable he could not flourish in the legal profession. He was called the 'poor man's barrister'. Of course, he was not the man to be discouraged by such things, as he was having complete confidence in his abilities."<sup>42</sup>

#### NOTES

1. *Dr. Ambedkar : Life and Mission* (Bombay, 1971). p.9.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10. The expression 'Chaudave Ratna' does not signify a sound thrashing, as Keer quotes it: it signifies 'the fourteenth jewel'. We fail to understand why Keer makes the mistake of misrepresenting the meaning of such a simple Hindi expression.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
4. *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. V, pp. 14-15.

5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
8. Some biographers tend to overlook the fact that B.R. Ambedkar's full name was Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar, and not Bhim Rao Ambedkar. The tendency to drop Ramji from his full name appears to be common.
9. Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (Delhi, 1985), p. 31.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
11. R.S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, pp. 124-25.
12. Sophie Baker, *Caste: At Home in Hindu India* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 153.
13. Ambedkar's Speech, *The Bombay Sentinel*, 20 January 1942.
14. *Op. cit.*, p. 16.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *W.S.*, Vol. I, p. 62.
18. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 17.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Dhananjay Keer, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.
21. M.L. Shahare, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
25. A.M. Rajasekhariah, *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Social Justice* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 10.
26. This work was published eight years afterwards by P.S. King & Sons, London, 1924. It was issued under the title : *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India: A Study in the Provincial Decentralisation of Imperial Finance.*
27. W.N. Kuber, *B.R. Ambedkar* (Delhi, 1978), p. 15.
28. According to Kuber, Ambedkar left the University in June 1916.
29. October 1916.
30. W.N. Kuber. *op. cit.*, p. 16.
31. K.S. Bharathi, *Foundations of Ambedkar Thought* (New Delhi, 1990), pp. 12-13.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
33. W.N. Kuber, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. S.R. Bakshi, *B.R. Ambedkar: Statesman and Constitutionalist* (Delhi, 1992), p. 5.
37. A.M. Rajasekhariah, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.
38. Khairmoday, *Life of Ambedkar* (Maharathi), Vol. II, p. 263.

39. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Future* (Delhi, 1990), p. 6.
40. W.N. Kuber, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
42. A.M. Rajasekhariah, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

### 3

## *The Scheme of Manu*

When Ambedkar returned to India he did not find himself a celebrity, but as people came to know the man and his manifold gifts as a scholar, a barrister, and an outspoken leader of the depressed classes, who so constantly and unwearingly asserted their rights all through his work, recognition by his contemporaries was not late in coming. The privileged classes were face to face with a revolutionary leader who was determined to remind them of their exploitative role vis-a-vis the untouchables, that section of the masses whom they had ostracized from time immemorial. Ambedkar had resolved that he would either revolutionize the whole society or, failing, end his life fighting for his downtrodden people, so that history is reversed and the underdogs are given their due. This became the mission of his life, a commitment and a sacred duty.

Those who attempt to assess Ambedkar's achievement often forget that not only was he a moving speaker and a man of astonishing intellectual range and command of learning, but also a superb, impeccable writer. During the remaining years of his life, the years expectedly eventful, he wrote on diverse topics and in all of them revealed a sharp, irreverent mind, at once discreet, dauntless, combative and packed with extraordinary erudition collected from those countless volumes he had read in the libraries of London and Bonn. He could exploit all the resources of this vast erudition in a manner few barristers could do, and was able to concentrate on a given problem with all the gifts and energies of his mind—sharpness, cleverness, depth, wit, etc. — focused on it. Some of these qualities were imbibed from such great masters as Kabir, Jyotiba Phoolley and the Buddha.

From the first he exercised, like them, an unlimited right to think, criticize, discuss and suggest and was firm in his conviction that the earth, the universe, belongs to everyone rather than to the so-called privileged classes. It is such convictions fused with extensive learning that eventually made him the architect of India's Constitution, a trail-blazing pioneer whose influence upon some of his leading contemporaries was profound and unmistakable. His ideas, revolutionary in spirit and expression, are still alive and are continuing to shape our socio-political and religious attitudes. Those adhering to the fundamentalist ideology, to the age-old injunctions of the *śāstras* and to antiquarian beliefs may not take his iconoclasm, his relentless fight with the upholders of brahmanism and with putrid conventionalism lying down. He awakened the depressed masses to their legitimate rights, championed their cause in different fora and, as their spokesman, represented them at numerous conferences where the motif running through his speeches was almost always the same: "Down with brahmanism! Up with untouchability!"

The same note, essentially aggressive and doctrinaire, was struck in the writings as well. Time and again Ambedkar drew the attention of his contemporaries towards the atrocities committed by barbaric bigots on the harijans and on the impecunious, toiling masses who were subjected to inhuman treatment, starvation, even physical torture by the caste Hindus. In painting their rebarbative misdeeds and their most rabid religious zealotry Ambedkar was bold and realistic, never feeling shy of exposing the designs, crooked and evil, of the powers that be.

An evidence of how the chaturvarnya perpetuated ignorance of the lower classes of the Hindus and completely disabled them for direct action is found in the upper-caste refusal to impart education to the Hindus belonging to the lower echelons of society. Moreover, on account of the 'wretched system of Chaturvarnya' these depressed people could not carry arms and could not, therefore, rebel. "They were all ploughmen or rather condemned to be ploughmen and they never were allowed to convert their ploughshare into swords. They had no bayonets and therefore everyone who chose could and did sit upon them. On account of the Chaturvarnya, they could receive no education. They could not think out or know the way to their



salvation. They were condemned to be lowly and not knowing the way of escape and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate.”<sup>1</sup>

Ambedkar’s vituperative impulse is definitely a reaction. It is animated by the hatred of a young Mahar for the kind of iniquitous and abject treatment meted out to a certain class of Hindus themselves, a class of dalits known in common parlance as harijans. Ambedkar refers to the prudish hypocrisy of the brahmans again and again and with mounting derision of the laws of Manu says: “The Brahmin flattered the Kshatriya and both let the Vaishya live in order to be able to live upon him. But the three agreed to beat down the Shudra. He was not allowed to acquire wealth lest he should be independent of the three *Varnas*. He was prohibited from acquiring knowledge lest he should keep a steady vigil regarding his interests. He was prohibited from bearing arms lest he should have the means to rebel against their authority. That this is how the Shudras were treated by the Tryavarnikas is evidenced by the Laws of Manu. There is no code of laws more infamous regarding social rights than the Laws of Manu. Any instance from anywhere of social injustice must pale before it. Why have the mass of people tolerated the social evils to which they have been subjected? There have been social revolutions in other countries of the world. Why have there not been social revolutions in India is a question which has incessantly troubled me. There is only one answer, which I can give and it is that the lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched system of Chaturvarnya.”<sup>2</sup>

The underlying motive of Ambedkar’s inflammatory writings and speeches was not derision of the brahmans but of their exploitative misdeeds, one of which was their maltreatment of the dalit sectors of Hindu society. This motive, essentially humane, manifests itself in his advocacy of equality: “Education everyone must have. Means of defence everyone must have.”<sup>3</sup> If the chaturvarnya has deprived the backward classes of education and means of defence, that is for obvious reasons—to perpetuate ignorance and brahmanic plutocracy and domination, to see to it that the hapless victims of ignorance remained depen-

dent on the caste Hindus forever. He reminds us of the brahmans' *modus operandi* which helped them tyrannize and beat down the śūdras. Sensing a kind of insidious conspiracy, Ambedkar describes how the three upper castes, though hostile to one another, agreed to keep the śūdras in utter subjugation and 'work by compromise', which was nothing but flattery of the kṣatriyas and letting the vaiśyas 'live in order to be able to live upon them'. Tracing the injustice done to the śūdras to the absurd caste-structured system of chaturvarnya, he holds that this system has been responsible for the denial of education to the lower *varṇas*. It was the system of chaturvarnya that prevented the lower-class people from possessing bayonets. Ambedkar makes a sharp contrast between the exploitation of the weak in Europe and that of the śūdras in India. The strong in Europe, he says, "have never contrived to make the weak helpless against exploitation so shamelessly as was the case in India among the Hindus. Social war has been raging between the strong and the weak far more violently in Europe than it has ever been in India. Yet, the weak in Europe has had in his freedom of military service his *physical weapon*, in suffering his *political weapon* and in education his *moral weapon*. These three weapons for emancipation were never withheld by the strong from the weak in Europe. All these weapons were, however, denied to the masses in India by Chaturvarnya."<sup>4</sup>

Indignant as ever—and righteous indignation of an almost psychotic character was a marked element in it—he goes on to expatiate on the chaturvarnya, on its evil and on its debilitating effects playing havoc with the Indian society from the days of the Vedas. The system, he avers, is not new; as a social organization, it has been tried and it has failed. In order to prevent such pronouncements from becoming exceptionally general, he musters sufficient evidence in support of them, confessing at the same time his failure to understand 'how anyone can hold out Chaturvarnya as an ideal to be aimed at or as a pattern on which the Hindu society should be remodelled'. Citing instances of rivalry and hostility between the different *varṇas*, he states: "How many times have the Brahmins annihilated the seed of the Kshatriyas! How many times have the Kshatriyas annihilated the Brahmins! The Mahabharata and the Puranas are full of

incidents of the strife between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas. They even quarreled over such petty questions as to who should salute first, as to who should give way first, the Brahmins or the Kshatriyas, when the two met in the street. Not only was the Brahmin an eyesore to the Kshatriya and the Kshatriya an eyesore to the Brahmin, it seems that the Kshatriyas had become tyrannical and the masses, disarmed as they were under the system of Chaturvarnya, were praying Almighty God for relief from their tyranny. The Bhagwat tells us very definitely that Krishna had taken Avtar for one sacred purpose and that was to annihilate the Kshatriyas.”<sup>5</sup>

Destroying the myth of Manu and the whole libraries of rubbish written on him, Ambedkar, inspired by what seems to be personal motivation, subjects him to the most vitriolic abuse and describes him as ‘an audacious person’, ‘a dare-devil fellow’, ‘a tyrant’, etc. He is charged with holding all the population in subjection. “I may seem hard on Manu,” admits Ambedkar, “but I am sure my force is not strong enough to kill his ghost. He lives, like a disembodied spirit and is appealed to, and I am afraid will yet live long.”<sup>6</sup> Lest one might consider this an exercise in sheer calumny Ambedkar acknowledges that Manu was not the giver of the law of caste, for he could not do so. The law existed long before Manu. Just because he was “an upholder of it and therefore philosophical about it,” Ambedkar mauls him, observing in the same breath that “certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of Caste *Dharma*. The spread and growth of the Caste system is too gigantic a task to be achieved by the power or cunning of an individual or of a class. Similar in argument is the theory that the Brahmins created the Caste. After what I have said regarding Manu, I need hardly say anything more, except to point out that it is incorrect in thought and malicious in intent. The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but the imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle.”<sup>7</sup>

Ambedkar was convinced that the division of society into castes was pernicious and responsible for the perpetuation of slavery of the depressed classes to the caste Hindus. The brah-

mans were responsible for this because they 'helped the process (of imposing the caste system on the non-brahman population) by their glib philosophy'. Ambedkar considers this probable. What is certain to him is that they could not have carried this scheme 'beyond their own confines'. Repudiating the orthodox belief 'that the Hindu Society was somehow moulded into the framework of the Caste System and that it is an organization consciously created by the *Shastras*,' Ambedkar argues 'on the adverse side of this attitude' and describes his aim as 'to show the falsity of the attitude that has exalted religious sanction to the position of a scientific explanation'.

Commenting on the great-man theory, he rejects it for its inability to help us very far in solving the problem. With his customary candour, he also rejects Western scholarship in this regard and mentions the Western attempt to offer five explanations, the nuclei round which the various castes in India have 'formed' being, according to them: (1) occupation; (2) survivals of tribal organization, etc.; (3) the rise of new belief; (4) cross-breeding, and (5) migration.

Here Ambedkar includes many references to authors who have advanced the various theories of caste. The paragraph, packed as it is with the names of these several authors, is illustrative of Ambedkar's wide reading and of his conviction that he was in possession of the truth:

In spite of the high theoretic value claimed by the several authors for their respective theories based on one or other of the above nuclei, one regrets to say that on close examination they are nothing more than filling illustrations—what Matthew Arnold means by "the grand name without the grand thing in it". Such are the various theories of caste advanced by Sir Denzil Ibbetson, Mr. Nesfield, Mr. Senart and Sir H. Risley. To criticise them in a lump would be to say that they are a disguised form of the *Petitio Principii* of formal logic. To illustrate: Mr. Nesfield says that "function and function only...was the foundation upon which the whole system of Castes in India was built up". But he may rightly be reminded that he does not very much advance our thought by making the above statement, which practically amounts to

saying that castes in India are functional or occupational, which is a very poor discovery! We have yet to know from Mr. Nesfield why is it that an occupational group turned into an occupational caste? I would very cheerfully have undertaken the task of dwelling on the theories of other ethnologists, had it not been for the fact that Mr. Nesfield's is a typical one.<sup>8</sup>

He does not criticize the theories that explain the Hindu social hierarchy 'as a natural phenomenon occurring in obedience to the law of disintegration'. Stating his own view on the origin of the caste or *jati*-system, he recalls how the Hindu society, like other societies, was composed of classes, the earliest known being the brāhmaṇs or the priestly class, the kṣatriya or the military class, the vaiśya or the merchant class, and the śūdra or the artisan and menial class. Ambedkar also calls attention to the fact that this was essentially a class system, in which a person, on being qualified, could change his class. Classes did, therefore, change their personnel. At some point of time in the history of Hinduism, the priestly class separated itself from the rest of the people and formed a class by itself, a caste of the highest kinslup groups. What Ambedkar says here about the priestly class detaching itself from the rest of the people and forming a *jati* is, historically speaking, not just fanciful. "The Portuguese, who first used the word 'caste', really meant India's ancient 'class' (*varṇa*)-system, described in the Rig Veda's sacrificial myth of creation."<sup>9</sup> Explaining how the true caste or *jati*-system originated, Stanley Wolpert says that "Fears of pollution or poisoning were doubtless one cause of ancient caste prohibitions and strictures. Walls of endogamy may have been erected after several daring members of important families ventured too far afield for brides, whose strange cooking may have poisoned their husbands, by either accident or design. *Jati* rules of commensality were thus made almost as strict as those limiting marriage options."<sup>10</sup>

With considerable lucidity Wolpert disentangles the whole complicated issue and offers a plausible explanation. The blame is rightly laid on the closed-door policy of the brāhmaṇs through which they became a caste by themselves. "The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour," maintains

Ambedkar, “underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute groups. The Vaishya and Shudra classes were the original inchoate plasm, which formed the sources of the numerous castes of today. As the military occupation does not very easily lend itself to very minute sub-division, the Kshatriya class could have differentiated into soldiers and administrators.”<sup>11</sup> They initiated erecting the walls of endogamy and fragmenting the traditional class, *varna*-system into castes. It is natural, admits Ambedkar, for a society to lend itself to minute sub-division, but what is unnatural to him is that these sub-divisions have lost their open-door character. The more a society becomes endogamous, the more rigid it becomes. What therefore has sickened the Indian society is this impregnable wall of *jati*-system. *Jati* rules of commensality have become almost as strict and inviolable as those which limit marriage options.

Occupation is less strictly defined by one's *jati* than either the pool of potential marriage or commensal partners. But every *jati* has some special job or craft, at least historically identified with its members, even as every *varna* does. There are washerfolk, tillers of the soil, blacksmiths, money-lenders, warriors, goldsmiths, silversmiths, barbers, weavers, oil-pressers. The latter, called *teli*, are essential for providing not only cooking oil but also ritually required oil for temple lights and festive holidays like Diwali. The *Bene Israel* (“Sons of Israel”) community is India's oldest Jewish community, and with several thousand households, still its largest. A Maharashtra *jati* of oil-pressers, they were called *Shanwar teli*—“Saturday's oil-pressers”—by their neighbours, because they never worked on Saturdays, their *Shabbat*. The most favoured Hindu explanation of India's caste system is, in fact, connected with divisions of labour it embodies, supposedly using “natural” human talents most “efficiently” in providing all goods and services required to sustain society.<sup>12</sup>

Once the sub-divisions or classes became self-enclosed or endogamous, castes were born. The open-door character of class system disappeared. One of the questions now arising from this is: Were these sub-divisions compelled to become endogamous,

or did they close their doors of their own accord ? Ambedkar submits that some of the sub-divisions closed the door while others found it closed against them. In this 'double line of answer', the first is a psychological interpretation and the other is mechanistic. Both are complementary and necessary to account for the formation of castes in its totality. Ambedkar takes up the two interpretations one by one and explains them at length. The psychological interpretation includes the human propensity to imitate. Since the brāhmaṇs became endogamous and adopted the closed-door system, others followed suit. Ambedkar refers to the scientific study made by Gabriel Tarde, 'who lays down three laws of imitation', one of these laws being that imitation flows from the higher to the lower: 'Given the opportunity, a nobility will always and everywhere imitate its leaders, its kings or sovereigns, and the people likewise, given the opportunity, its nobility'.<sup>13</sup> The second law of imitation, according to Tarde, is that the thing most imitated "is the most superior one of those that are nearest. In fact, the influence of the model's example is efficacious inversely to its *distance* as well as directly to its superiority...However distant in space a stranger may be, he is close by, from this point of view, if we have numerous and daily relations with him and if we have every facility to satisfy our desire to imitate him. This law of the imitation of the nearest, of the least distant, explains the gradual and consecutive character of the spread of an example that has been set by the higher social ranks."<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar then goes on to prove his thesis—which, he says with more than scholarly pride, with all his sense of superiority, really needs no proof—that some castes were formed by imitation. He finds an evidence of this in the fact that the conditions vital for the formation of castes by imitation existed in the Hindu society in which the brāhmaṇ was treated as a semi-god and very nearly a demi-god. Explaining why the non-brāhmaṇ masses, though captive to the yoke of brāhmaṇism, tended to imitate the semi-gods, Ambedkar remarks that the brāhmaṇ's "prestige is unquestionable and is the fountain-head of bliss and good. Can such a being, idolised by scriptures and venerated by the priest-ridden multitude, fail to project his personality on the suppliant humanity? Why, if the story be true, he is believed to be the

very end of creation. Such a creature is worthy of more than mere imitation, but at least of imitation; and if he lives in an endogamous enclosure, should not the rest follow his example ? Frail humanity! Be it embodied in a grave philosopher or a frivolous housemaid, it succumbs. It cannot be otherwise. Imitation is easy and invention is difficult.”<sup>15</sup>

Irrefutable as ever, Ambedkar advances his arguments logically and sets great store on the virtue of plain, straightforward speaking. His arguments are attempts to expose the deluded humbugs who treat others with contempt and rush about in pursuit of sounds and forms seeking realization in book-knowledge instead of using their own treasure house. The whole essay on ‘Castes in India’ makes the brāhmaṇs look like the spew of mankind, of every civilized citizen. The arguments also reveal that Ambedkar could at times be a good hater as well as an inimitable defender, for hidden in them is also an exponent, subtly advocating the creation of a casteless society free from the bane of brāhmaṇism.

The way he argues for distributive justice and social reform in India reveals his unimpeded powers of dialectic and exemplifies his attitude to the egregious Hindus and their no less egregious spokesmen. He opens his arguments with what sounds like an aphoristic statement, an epigram: “The path of social reform like the path to heaven at any rate in India, is strewn with many difficulties.” Here in India social reform is anathema, for it has few friends and many critics. Those who criticize it are the political reformers and the socialists. There was a time when the importance of social efficiency was greatly realized and it was said that no permanent progress in the other fields of activity was possible without it. People, no less than the learned sociologists and reformers, believe that riddled as it was with evil customs, Hindu society had fallen from its state of efficiency and required ceaseless efforts to be purged of them. The National Congress was founded with this end in view and was accompanied by the birth of the Social Conference. While the Congress aimed at locating and defining the weak areas in the political organization of the country, the Social Conference engaged itself in eradicating the weaknesses corroding the social organization of the Hindu society. “For some time,” Ambedkar



adds, "the Congress and the Conference worked as two wings of one common activity and they held their annual sessions in the same pandal. But soon the two wings developed into two parties, a Political Reform Party and a Social Reform Party, between whom there raged a fierce controversy. The Political Reform Party supported the National Congress and the Social Reform Party supported the Social Conference. The two bodies thus became two hostile camps. The point at issue was whether social reform should precede political reform. For a decade the forces were evenly balanced and the battle was fought without victory to either side. It was however evident that the fortunes of the Social Conference were ebbing fast. The gentleman who presided over the sessions of the Social Conference lamented that the majority of the educated Hindus were for political advancement and indifferent to social reform and that while the number of those who attended the Congress was very large and the number who did not attend but who sympathized with it even larger, the number of those who attended the Social Conference was very much smaller."<sup>16</sup>

This indifference, he continues, this thinning of its ranks then turned into the politicians' active hostility. The Congress forbade the use of its pandal and "the spirit of enmity went to such a pitch that when the Social Conference desired to erect its own pandal a threat to burn the pandal was held out by its opponents. Thus in course of time the party in favour of political reform won and the Social Conference vanished and was forgotten. The speech, delivered by Mr. W. C. Bonnerji in 1892 at Allahabad as President of the eighth session of the Congress, sounds like a funeral oration at the death of the Social Conference..."<sup>17</sup> This, adds Ambedkar, is typical of the Congress attitude. He quotes from the speech an important extract in which Bonnerji had remarked that he had no patience with those who said we should not be fit for political reform until we reformed our social system, that he failed to see any connection between the two. The passage Ambedkar quotes is loudly cheered by the audience and ends with the following rhetorical questions: "Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? because our wives and

daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends? because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge?"<sup>18</sup>

In all such places Ambedkar affords, firstly, glimpses of his own views on contemporary political activities, and, secondly, some fragments of his conception of the activities of the proponents of political reform. It has now been convincingly demonstrated that the Political Reform Party and the Social Reform Party in supporting the National Congress and the Social Conference were pursuing two antagonistic policies.

In his lengthy disquisition 'Annihilation of Caste' Ambedkar draws upon the treatment of the untouchables in India. The accounts, the details, and the judgements are all factual and, once perused in proper perspective, leave no doubt of his attitude towards that section of Indian society which has been victimized by the high-caste Hindus for centuries. Ambedkar draws a realistic picture of the state of the untouchables under the rule of the Peshwas in the Maratha country and describes how he was not allowed to use the public streets if a caste Hindu was coming along lest he should pollute the upper-caste Hindu merely by his shadow. With considerable caustic realism he goes on to pour ridicule on the entire caste system, the system that divides man from man and makes the one lord over the other. How pathetic the treatment meted out to the 'traumatised tenants' has been is best described by Ambedkar in the following words:

The untouchable was required to have a black thread either on his wrist or in his neck as a sign or a mark to prevent the Hindus from getting themselves polluted by his touch through mistake. In Poona, the capital of the Peshwa, the untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he treaded on lest a Hindu walking on the same should be polluted. In Poona, the untouchable was required to carry an earthen pot, hung in his neck wherever he went, for holding his spit lest his spit falling on earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to tread on it. Let me take more recent facts. The tyranny practised by the Hindus upon the Balais, an untouchable community in Central India, will serve my

purpose. You will find a report of this in the *Times of India* of 4th January 1928.<sup>19</sup>

To the tyranny practised by the Hindus upon the untouchables Ambedkar refers more than once, but in every such utterance his intention is always the same: to draw attention to the rationale for annihilation of caste. It is not only the untouchable community of the Balais that was subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment, there are many such communities which have suffered on account of their accident of birth, viz., untouchability. Having enumerated the rules which the high-caste Hindus had laid down for the Balais, Ambedkar states the case for social reform and follows, he admits, Mr. Bonnerji as nearly as he can. With the forthrightness and candour for which he is rightly famous, he asks: "Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public schools? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or ornaments they like? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like?"<sup>20</sup> He can, he adds, ask many such questions, but he does not, for the simple reason that these are sufficient. He pre-empted all possible answers to these questions by characteristically making a subtle statement: "I am sure no sensible man will have the courage to give an affirmative answer." The obvious implication is that if you give an affirmative answer you are not sensible or that you are stupid, a crackpot.

Ambedkar was a born lawyer, a consummate advocate who could indulge in hair-splitting at will and, through minute analysis, even cook an argument. But no sophistry was at all needed to prove that social reform can relate both to the reform of the Hindu family and to the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. In the first sense social reform has relation to widow remarriage, child marriage and the like, while the reform of the Hindu society relates to the abolition of the caste system. The Social Conference was concerned primarily

with the reform of the high-caste Hindu family and consisted mostly of enlightened high-caste Hindus who were not aware of the necessity for launching a nation-wide movement for the abolition of caste iniquities. Perhaps they lacked courage and “felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought centered round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the sense of the break-up of the caste system. It was never put in issue by the reformers. That is the reason why the Social Reform Party lost.”<sup>21</sup>

Not content, however, with these pleadings for social reform, Ambedkar also attempts to show why there is no hope of the brāhmaṇs ever taking up a lead in social reform. He knows that though they form the vanguard of the movement for political reform and to some extent also for economic reform, they have never backed ‘the army raised to break down the barricades of caste’ Nor is there any hope of the brāhmaṇs ever taking up the leadership of this army. One may argue that being an enlightened class, they know that Hindu society is plagued by caste and that they must not therefore shun social reform. But in submitting all such arguments what is forgotten is that the break-up of the caste system is bound to affect adversely the brāhmaṇ caste. It would, therefore, be unjust to expect the secular brāhmaṇs to lead a movement directed against the priestly brāhmaṇs. Ambedkar holds that it is futile to make a distinction between secular brāhmaṇs and priestly brāhmaṇs. In his judgement, both are kith and kin; they are but two arms of the same body. He quotes Prof. Dicey’s *English Constitution* in which he, Dicey, notes, among other things, how the actual exercise of sovereignty by any power, notably by Parliament, is bounded by internal and external limitations: “The external limit to the real power of a sovereign consists in the possibility or certainty that his subjects or a large number of them will disobey or resist his laws...The internal limit to the exercise of sovereignty arises from the nature of the sovereign power itself. Even a despot exercises his powers in accordance with his character, which is

itself moulded by the circumstance under which he lives, including under that head the moral feelings of the time and the society to which he belongs. The Sultan could not, if he would, change the religion of the Mohammedan world, but even if he could do so, it is in the very highest degree improbable that the head of Mohammedanism should wish to overthrow the religion of Mohammed; the internal check on the exercise of the Sultan's power is at least as strong as the external limitation. People sometimes ask the idle question, why the Pope does not introduce this or that reform? The true answer is that a revolutionist is not the kind of man who becomes a Pope and that a man who becomes a Pope has no wish to be a revolutionist."<sup>22</sup>

Since these remarks apply to the brāhman̄s of India, Ambedkar has little hesitation in concluding that "if a man who becomes a Pope has no wish to become a revolutionary, a man who is born a Brahmin has much less desire to become a revolutionary. Indeed, to expect a Brahmin to be a revolutionary in matters of social reform is as idle as to expect the British Parliament, as was said by Leslie Stephen, to pass an Act requiring all blue-eyed babies to be murdered."<sup>23</sup>

Of Ambedkar's attitude to the chaturvarnya and the Hindu caste system something has already been said; by now he brings his views to a close, but not before adding that Lord Acton's observation that inequality has grown as a result of historical circumstances and that it has never been adopted as a creed, needs to be corrected. In making this statement the Lord, according to Ambedkar, omits a significant instance that disproves his dictum: he does not take into consideration how in Hinduism inequality is a religious doctrine and how this doctrine has been 'adopted and conscientiously preached as a sacred dogma'. The truth is, adds Ambedkar, that this has been no less than an official creed which people are not ashamed of professing openly. "Inequality for the Hindus is a divinely prescribed way of life as a religious doctrine and as a prescribed way of life, it has become incarnate in Hindu Society and is shaped and moulded by it in its thoughts and in its doings. Indeed, inequality is the Soul of Hinduism."<sup>24</sup>

That Ambedkar never tires of pouring scorn upon casteism, especially upon the ideal of chaturvarnya, is made clear by his

numerous lengthy disquisitions on Hinduism, such as 'Philosophy of Hinduism', incidentally the most solid résumé of his views, and by his speeches and prolusions. Never doubtful as to the thralldom of his submerged fellowmen, he holds casteism responsible for it, for all the servility and disabilities of the so-called sub-human śūdras. The ideal of caste, according to him, is not merely an ideal for the Hindus; it is put into practice and is made real, so that in this matter, the Hindus have faithfully followed Nietzsche's pronouncement: realize the ideal and idealize the real. "The value of the ideal," he further observes in a series of apothegms, "must be tested by its results. If experience therefore must be the criterion then the ideal of Chaturvarnya stands thrice condemned. Purely as a form of social organization it stands condemned. As a producer's organization it stands discredited. As an ideal scheme of distribution it has miserably failed. If it is an ideal form of organization how is it that Hinduism has been unable to form a common front. If it is an ideal form of production, how is it that its technique never advanced beyond that of the primitive man. If it is an ideal form of distribution, how is it that it has produced appalling inequality of wealth, immense wealth side by side extreme poverty."<sup>25</sup> He, therefore, draws the following conclusion: caste divides labourers; it dissociates work from interest and disconnects intelligence from manual labour; in addition, it devitalizes by denying them the right to cultivate vital interest and prevents mobilization.

Ambedkar carries this denunciation of the caste system further by adding that it not only divides labour but also labourers. Division of labour is one of the indisputable needs of civilized society, but there is no civilized society in which division of labour is accompanied by this 'unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments'. "Caste System is not merely a division of labourers—which is quite different from division of labour—it is an hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. There is also a third point of criticism against this view of the Caste System. This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes. Social and individual efficiency

requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the Caste System in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents. Looked at from another point of view this stratification of occupations which is the result of the Caste System is positively pernicious.”<sup>20</sup>

Where the caste system prevails, as in Hinduism, division of labour which it brings about, is not a division based on choice, for individual sentiments and preferences have no place in it. In fact, according to Ambedkar, the system is based on the dogma of predestination. Secondly, it dissociates intelligence from work and gives rise to contempt for labour. The proponents of the caste theory believe that a brahman who is allowed to cultivate his intellect is not permitted to labour; instead, he is taught to look down upon labour. The śūdra on the other hand is required to labour but not permitted to cultivate his intelligence. Its consequences are disastrous.

Caste, Ambedkar asseverates, devitalizes a person and is a process of sterilization. How it does so is shown by him in the following manner.

His argument opens with the plain statement that education, wealth, labour are all necessary to enable an individual to reach a free and full manhood. Wealth and labour without education are fruitless just as education without wealth and labour is barren. But the caste system enjoins that brahmins should cultivate knowledge, kṣatriyas should bear arms, and the vaiśyas should engage themselves in trade. The argument is best stated in Ambedkar’s own words:

...that the Shudra should serve is presented as a theory of mutual interdependence found in the family. It is asked why should the Shudra need trouble to acquire wealth when the three Varnas are there to support him; why need the Shudra bother to take to education when the Brahmin to whom he can go when the occasion for reading or writing arises; why need the Shudra worry to arm himself because there is the Kshatriya to protect him? The theory of Chaturvarnya

understood in this sense may be said to look upon the Shudra as the ward and the three Varnas as his guardians. Thus interpreted it is a simple and alluring theory. Assuming this to be the correct view of the underlying conception of Chaturvarnya it seems to me that the system is neither fool-proof nor knave-proof. What is to happen if the Brahmins, Vaishyas and Kshatriyas fail to pursue knowledge, to engage in economic enterprises and to be efficient soldiers which are their respective functions? Contrarywise, suppose that they discharge their functions but flout their duty to the Shudra or to one another? What is to happen to the Shudra if the three classes refuse to support him on fair terms or combine to keep him down? Who is to safeguard the interests of the Shudra or for the matter of that of the Vaishya and Kshatriya when the person who is trying to take advantage of his ignorance is the Brahmin? Who is to defend the liberty of the Shudra or that of the Brahmin and the Vaishya, when the person who is robbing him of it is the Kshatriya? Inter-dependence of one class on another class is inevitable. Even dependence of one class upon another may sometimes become allowable. But why make one person depend upon another in the matter of his vital needs? Education everyone must have. Means of defence every one (sic) must have. These are the paramount requirements of every man for his self-preservation. How can the fact that his neighbour is educated and armed, help a man who is uneducated and disarmed. The whole theory is absurd.<sup>27</sup>

While examining the all-important question of mobilization, Ambedkar is of the view that where caste system prevails mobilization of all national resources for military purposes is not possible. Though war makes such a mobilization imperative, in India, where caste hierarchy has taken deep roots, its importance has not been fully realized, which is why the country has faced defeats 'throughout history' due to caste. The age-old attitude that the kṣatriyas alone are expected to fight and repel the enemy, prevents the brāhmaṇs and vaiśyas from arming themselves and from putting up a stiff resistance to the invader. Moreover, though the śūdras formed the large majority of the



country's population, they were disarmed. As a result of this short-sighted policy the small class of kṣatriyas was easily defeated by the foreign foe and, that happening, the whole country fell at his feet without offering any resistance. With the fall of the kṣatriyas everything fell, for there was no general mobilization. "If these conclusions are sound, how can a philosophy which dissects society in fragments, which dissociates work from interest, which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the rights of man to interests vital to life and which prevented society from mobilizing resources for common action in the hour of danger, be said to satisfy the test of Social Utility."<sup>28</sup>

What discredits the philosophy of Hinduism is that it does not satisfy either the test of social utility or the test of individual justice. It is founded on the principle that to be right and good the act must serve the interest of the class of supermen called brāhmaṇs. Ambedkar quotes Oscar Wilde's saying that to be intelligible is to be found out. Manu, he declares is neither afraid nor ashamed of being found out, for neither does he leave it to be found out nor does he refrain from expressing his view in resonant and majestic notes. To him, the brāhmaṇs are the lord of all varnas and, having sprung from Prajapati's mouth, are the most excellent of all created things and are an external incarnation of the sacred Veda. Thus hymning the supremacy of the brāhmaṇs, Manu declares:

The very birth of a Brahmana is an eternal incarnation of the sacred Law (Veda); for he is born to (fulfil) the sacred law, and becomes one with Brahman (God).

A Brahmana, coming into existence, is born as the highest on earth, the lord of all created beings, for the protection of the treasury of the Law.<sup>29</sup>

From the passages quoted by Ambedkar it is clear that Manu wants śūdras to serve the brāhmaṇs either for the sake of heaven or with a view to both this life and the next. To this Manu adds:

But let a Shudra serve Brahmins, either for the sake of heaven or with a view to both this life and the next, for he

who is called the servant of a Brahman thereby gains all his ends.

The service of the Brahmana alone is declared to be an excellent occupation for a Shudra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear no fruit.

No collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra, even though he be able to do it; for a Shudra who has acquired wealth gives pain to Brahman.<sup>30</sup>

For Ambedkar, as for many others who share his beliefs, these lines constitute 'the core and the heart of the philosophy of Hinduism'. Pouring renewed scorn on Hinduism as 'the gospel of the superman', Ambedkar adds a parallel to this philosophy, a parallel which he 'hates to suggest'. "But it is so obvious," he says. "The parallel to this philosophy of Hinduism is to be found in Nietzsche."<sup>31</sup> He is not unaware that the Hindus will find this suggestion rather irksome, for the simple reason that Nietzsche's philosophy 'stands in great odium'. None but Nietzsche himself writes that he was "sometimes deified as the philosopher of the aristocracy and squirearchy, sometimes hooted at, sometimes pitied and sometimes boycotted as an inhuman being."

As well as the students of European history spanning a few decades before the Second World War, Ambedkar knows why the Nazis trace their ancestry from Nietzsche and regard him as their spiritual parent. He draws attention to a photograph of Hitler standing beside a bust of Nietzsche and to Hitler taking Nietzsche's writings under his charge and ferreting out extracts which are loudly proclaimed at the ceremonies of Nazism. "Nor is the claim by the Nazis of spiritual ancestry with Nietzsche denied by his near relations. Nietzsche's own cousin Richard Ochler approvingly says that Nietzsche's thought is Hitler in action and that Nietzsche was the foremost pioneer of the Nazi accession to power. Nietzsche's own sister, few months before her death, thanks the Feurhar for the honour he graciously bestows on her brother declaring that she sees in him that incarnation of the 'Superman' foretold by Zarathustra."<sup>32</sup>

Ambedkar reproduces Nietzsche's declaration that in his philosophy he is only following the scheme of Manu. He quotes

the famous *Anti Christ* of Nietzsche to show that Zarathustra is a new name for Manu and that *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is but a new edition of *Manusmriti*. Manu and Nietzsche, however, differed in one important respect: while Nietzsche's supermen were supermen by reason of their worth, Manu's supermen were supermen by reason of their birth. Nietzsche, according to Ambedkar, was a 'genuine disinterested philosopher', whereas Manu was "an hireling engaged to propound a philosophy which served the interest of a class born in a group and whose title to being supermen was not to be lost even if they lost their virtue." In support, Ambedkar quotes the following lines from Manu:

Yet a Brahman, unable to subsist by his duties just mentioned, may live by the duty of a soldier; for that is the next rank.

If it be asked, how he must live, should he be unable to get a subsistence by either of those employments; the answer is, he may subsist as a mercantile man, applying himself into tillage and attendance on cattle.

A Brāhmana, be he ignorant or learned, is a great divinity, just as the fire, whether carried forth (for the performance of a burnt oblation) or not carried forth, is a great divinity.

Thus, though the Brahmins employ themselves in all (sorts) of mean occupation, they must be honoured in every way; (for each of) them is a very great diety (sic).<sup>33</sup>

The texts from Manu lead to the conclusion, as drawn by Ambedkar, that his is "a degraded and degenerate philosophy of superman as compared with that of Nietzsche and therefore far more odious and loathsome than the philosophy of Nietzsche."<sup>34</sup>

Hinduism is on no account a religion of humanity. Instead of vitrifying the inmost life of ordinary humanity, it paralyses it. It does not offer any nourishment for ordinary human souls, nor any comfort for ordinary human sorrow. Without offering any help for ordinary human weakness, it abandons us in darkness face to face with the purblind energies of nature. "Not less cruel than the crudest irreligion, does it leave men divorced from all communion with God."<sup>35</sup>

The Smritis have not been less callous to the śūdras. Upholding the doctrine of caste in the strongest and clearest possible

terms, they also vouch for the superiority of the brāhmaṇs, their rights and privileges. Going a little further, they lend support to the doctrine of the subordination of the kṣatriyas and vaiśyas and the doctrine of the degradation of the śūdras. Such being the philosophy of the Smritis, the brāhmaṇs invested them with the authority claimed by the Vedas. A precis of what Ambedkar has to say in conclusion is contained in the lines: "The Brahmins who were the authors of the whole body of Hindu Religious Literature—except the Upanishad Literature—took good care to inject the doctrines formulated by them in the Smritis, into the Vedas and the Bhagwat Geeta. Nothing is to be gained in picking and choosing between them. The philosophy of Hinduism will be the same whether one takes the Manu Smriti as its Gospel or whether one takes the Vedas and the Bhagwat Geeta as the gospel of Hinduism."<sup>36</sup>

Far from relying on mere authoritative pronouncements of others, he attempts also to show that Hindu ethics is the worship of the superman, that Hindu morality is purely social, traditional and customary, and that the philosophy of the Upanishads signifies withdrawal from the struggle for existence by resort to asceticism and a destruction of desire by self-mortification. Ambedkar quotes Huxley and Lala Hardyal, both of whom have condemned the philosophy of the Upanishads. The quotation from the latter is of special interest and deserves reproduction *in toto*.

The Upanishads claim to expound 'that, by knowing which everything is known'. This quest for 'the absolute' is the basis of all the spurious metaphysics of India. The treatises are full of absurd conceits, quaint fancies, and chaotic speculations. And we have not learned that they are worthless. We keep moving in the old rut; we edit and re-edit the old books instead of translating the classics of European social thought. What could Europe be if Frederic Harrison, Bricux, Bebel, Anatole France, Herve, Haekel, Giddings and Marshall should employ their time in composing treatises on Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, and discussing the merits of the laws of the Pentateuch and the poetry of Beowulf? Indian Pandits and graduates seem to suffer from a kind of

mania for what is effete and antiquated. Thus an institution, established by progressive men, aims at leading our youths through Sanskrit grammar to the Vedas via the Six Darshanas! What a false move in the quest for wisdom! It is as if a caravan should travel across the desert to the shores of the Dead Sea in search of fresh water! Young men of India, look not for wisdom in the musty parchments of your metaphysical treatises. There is nothing but an endless round of verba! jugglery there. Read Rousseau and Voltaire, Plato and Aristotle, Haeckel and Spencer, Marx and Tolstoi, Ruskin and Comte, and other European thinkers, if you wish to understand life and its problems.<sup>37</sup>

This passage, with its daring denunciation of Indian pandits as maniacs, flows from the author's perennial discontent with India's young men, and it shows, like Ambedkar's own writings, what ails and bedevils Indian society in general and Hinduism in particular. The tone of Hardayal's passage, scathing and inflammatory as it is, sizzles with the fury and hate which characterize Ambedkar's voice:

"To me this Chaturvarnya with its old labels is utterly repellent and my whole being rebels against it."

"(Caste) has completely disorganised and demoralised the Hindus."

"Assuming that Chaturvarnya is practicable, I contend that it is the most vicious system."

"... a Hindu is not free to use his reasoning faculty...Railway journeys and foreign travels are really occasions of crisis in the life of a Hindu and it is natural to expect a Hindu to ask himself why he should maintain Caste at all, if he cannot maintain it at all times. But he does not. He breaks Caste at one step and proceeds to observe it at the next without raising any question. The reason for this astonishing conduct is to be found in the rule of the Shastras, which directs him to maintain Caste as far as possible and to undergo prayaschitta when he cannot. By this theory of prayaschitta, the Shastras by following a spirit of compromise have given, (sic) Caste a perpetual lease of life and have smothered reflective thought which would have otherwise led to the destruction of the notion of Caste."<sup>38</sup>

As inveterate critics of Hindu society, both Hardayal and Ambedkar voice their bitterness with unmistakable impetuosity. Yet Ambedkar's diatribes are like those of a moralist and satirist; they are expressions not of the hate of an individual but of love of virtue. We admire the strength of these diatribes and love the man who wields his great power of ridicule and invective. Where the theme is Hinduism or its philosophy, casteism or the Vedas, śāstras, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, the tyranny of the caste Hindus and the slavery of the deprived classes, Ambedkar pours out like a torrent his numerous speeches and writings. He never applies himself to any interest contrary to that of the untouchables. The true end of all his work, whether it is a piece of writing or speech, is the amendment of vices by correction. "And he who writes honestly," says John Dryden, "is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician to the patient, when he prescribes harsh remedies to an inveterate disease...To conclude all; if the body politic have any analogy to the natural, in my weak judgement, an act of oblivion were as necessary in a hot distempered state as an opiate would be in a raging fever."

Perhaps it is no wonder that Ambedkar had rather a low view of caste-ridden Hinduism. He was not made for compromise, and never tried it. We shall see how he carried his view with complete consistency forward into his representative works, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, *Shudras*, *Pakistan or the Partition of India* and *Castes in India*: they are continuous with *Annihilation of Caste*. The theme plays a cardinal part in his writings on social justice and political safeguards for the depressed classes and on the problems of minorities, as the experience behind it was central in the author's personal life. We need not doubt that, if he had not suffered at the hands of the caste Hindus, suffered lasting humiliation, undergone this trauma, his views would have been somewhat different, at least. As it was, he never lets up in the line he takes about Hinduism, and goes on and on enforcing it.

We need not suppose that it recommends him to the Hindus today, after the revival of Hindu fundamentalism and caste-based

politics, not the least of the social and political changes in post-independence India.

### NOTES

1. *W.S.*, Vol. I, p. 63.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
9. Stanley Wolpert, *An Introduction to India* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 119.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *W.S.*, Vol. I, p. 18.
12. Stanley Wolpert, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-21.
13. *W S*, Vol. I, p. 19. The pertinence of this argument becomes all the more appreciable on account of this reference brought to bear upon the issue in question. Ambedkar's extensive reading, of which the reference to Gabriel Tarde is illustrative, adds piquancy to the problem and its solution.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 41-42.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
24. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 66.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
28. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 71.
29. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 73.
30. *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 74.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.
38. K.L. Chanchreek & Saroj Prasad, *Social Justice and Political Safeguards for Depressed Classes: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, Delhi: (1931), p. 66.





## 4

### *Bhima Battles for Rights*

It would be clear by now that Ambedkar's was not a middle-of-the road attitude to Hinduism but one plainly to the extreme of it. "We cannot accept a religion which fosters and encourages casteism," he announces, "or which is disgusting in the value it attaches to inequality." Such words must have been hard for Ambedkar to write, the more so since he was born a Hindu, whose ancestors were all Hindus. But centuries of exploitation and repression, humiliating and inhuman treatment meted out to the avarnas and panchamas, and blind faith in the śāstras that were by now effete and worthless were depressing and degrading. He was not yet a Buddhist, but he was gradually veering towards Buddhism. He was determined to escape the gutter and glimpse the stars of a religion that ensured freedom and equality. The adoption of a new faith was for him a catharsis, a purging of his self-destructive anger; in a release of contempt and ire he completed his 'Philosophy of Hinduism', 'Riddles in Hinduism' and 'Annihilation of Caste', in which he records his impression of this age-old religion with blunt and inimitable honesty. For the most part he abandons his gracious and bending naturalness and courtesy for an insuperable outspokenness, but the Ambedkarian soundness of argument—its rationale—is maintained; it is revealed flatly and incontrovertibly in the much-quoted 'Annihilation of Caste' and 'Philosophy of Hinduism'. In all his essays he thus rejects the stereotypes of judgment, the blacks and whites of lazy thinking about the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, the *ne plus ultra* of Hinduism, and exposes for all posterity the inhumanity, illogicality, and contradictions of Hindu faith and morals.

To study Ambedkar is to study a revolutionary in conflict with convention, to be more precise, with Hinduism, as it is obvious from the three essays—the trilogy of hate—mentioned above. The rage simmering within him finds expression on hundreds of occasions, most uncompromisingly when in 1924 he established the Council for the Welfare of the Outcastes (Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha). With the founding of this, Ambedkar becomes a leader and spokesman of the depressed classes. The poor man's barrister had already "made a diamond-hard resolve to wage unwavering battle against the social inhumanity of the élite castes on the inferior species."

From 1924 he devotes himself more and more to this struggle. Disdaining the comforts and luxuries of life, he begins his historic movement towards those summits of the human mission on which his gaze had been fixed. At thirty-four, Ambedkar becomes a different being. Without benefits of formal theology, he knew as no other Hindu theologian on record had known, that if Hinduism is to live, its caste system must die, for to it can be traced all the ills that fester it. Influenced by the American proposition of equality, he was also stirred by Joti Rao Phooley, Marx, Ranade, Mill, and the Buddha. He declared that he would devote all the remaining years of his life to the liquidation of inequality and to 'the deliverance of the panchama proletariat'. He wrestled, says Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, like a Bhima "and used politico-legal strategies to accomplish his mission. He was a daring compound of political fighter for the fallen fifth of Indian humanity, legal luminary who crossed political swords with the Mahatma, able administrator who served in government under the Raj and in the Republic, unrelenting opponent of caste-charged Hinduism who flowed with his fellowmen into the nirvana of Buddhism, and, finally, distinguished jurist and Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, who shaped that monumental document for the social revolution of a decolonised nation."<sup>1</sup>

He never stopped working for those to whom the expressive name of harijans is given. He left it only when he felt he could serve it more effectively. At thirty-five he set up four boarding houses in Bombay Presidency for untouchable students, wrote 'The Present Problem in Indian Currency' for *The Servant of*

*India*, presided over a conference of the Bombay Presidency Bahishkrit Parishad at Nipani, Belgaun, where he spoke on the need for social reform prior to political reform. In December 1925, he gave evidence before the Royal Commission on Indian Currency, headed by Hilton Young, and deposed that the gold exchange standard could not be continued with any advantage to India. Some of the events, which took place between 1926 and 1936, included his maiden speech on budget in the Bombay Legislative Council Debates, the Presidential address at the conference of untouchables (Kolaba District Depressed Classes Conference at Mahad) on March 19-20, 1927, the starting of the Marathi fortnightly, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, with Ambedkar himself as its editor, his presidentship of the Shivajayanti Celebrations at Badlapur, near Kalyan, and the conferment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on Ambedkar by Columbia University for his thesis *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*. June 1927 is particularly notable for the Thakurdwar incident. With the announcement that the new temple at Thakurdwar was open to all Hindus, Dr Ambedkar fixed up an appointment with the authorities of the temple, went there with Shrivastav, and was mobbed and heckled. This happening, the temple authorities went back on their word, cancelled the appointment, and, ritualists as they were, 'sanctified' the temple which, they believed, had been 'defiled' by the presence of Ambedkar. The same month witnessed his appointment on the editorial committee of the *Bombay Law Journal* along with S.R. Davar and M.C. Chagla. In the following month a public meeting of the depressed classes with Ambedkar as its president was held at the Cowasji Jehangir Hall to protest against the hardships inflicted on the untouchables of Mahad. One of the resolutions passed at the meeting urged the Government to establish a separate department to deal with the grievances of the depressed classes as was done in the Madras Presidency. On July 27, 1927, a day after the depressed classes of Amravati gave an ultimatum to the temple authorities that they would enter the temple, Dr. Ambedkar was seen in Bombay Legislative Council speaking on the Bombay University Bill and representing the interests of his class. Without mincing his words he demanded their representation in the Senate. On August 21 the management of the

Ambadevi Temple at Amaravati expressed its inability to infringe the traditional practice and norms and allow temple entry to the depressed classes. In September the Samata Samaj Sangh (League for Equality) was founded with the lofty creed that all human beings are equal and that they are entitled to equal opportunities for the realization of their personalities and enrichment of their lives. On the 15th of this month the Mahad satyagraha committee announced December 25 and 26 as the dates for the satyagraha. It was at this time that C.B. Khairmoday, his noted Marathi biographer, and his associates first suggested the use of the sobriquets 'Babasaheb' for Dr. Ambedkar and 'Aisaheb' for Mrs. Ramabai Ambedkar. These sobriquets, however, gained wide currency from 1930. Some of the events of 1927 included his participation as president in a number of conferences and functions. At one time he speaks in the Legislative Council on small land-holdings, at another he dilates on the need to repeal the Watan Act, at yet another declares that if social revolution fails to remove untouchability, he along with other members of his class shall have to bring about a religious revolution. Towards the close of 1927 Appadurai, an associate of Pandit Iyodhi Doss, founded the South India Buddhist Association at the Kolar Gold Fields. He spread the message of Dr. Ambedkar in south India and rendered all possible help to start the Scheduled Castes Federation there later on.

Back in Bombay from the Mahad Conference in January 1928 Ambedkar busied himself with new programmes, but he was perhaps working against time. At about thirty-eight he was appointed District Deputy Collector; he introduced a Bill to amend the Hereditary Offices Act of 1874, sent a printed memorandum to the Simon Commission on behalf of the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha and spoke in the Assembly on maternity leave facilities to women workers. He went on with his work. The rest of his life was crammed with activities, most of which aimed, directly or indirectly, at ameliorating the sufferings of the weaker sections of his country, at raising 'the semi-slave to a new dignity', or at building up the vast reading which served him well for his life's work. In October 1929 the Parvati temple satyagraha began; in March 1930 Dr. Ambedkar cautioned Dadasaheb Gaikwad of Nasik not to precipitate matters relating to the

Kalaram temple satyagraha. He had written to the Governor of Bombay, protesting against the attitude of the Collector. In August he presided over the all-India Depressed Class Conference (First Session) at Nagpur-Kamptee and in his presidential speech demanded adequate representation of this class in all the legislatures of the country, central and provincial. Another demand which he made related to reservation in adequate proportion in the Public Services in the country. One of the most important events of the year, however, was his participation in the Round Table Conference held in October in London. While in London, he prepared two memoranda about the political demands of the untouchables and their recruitment in the army. It is obvious that Ambedkar, as always, never lost sight of the goal, his mission, the interest of the depressed classes and of his role as a neo-Manu. If the Manu of the upper-class elites had apotheosized the brāhmaṇas, this Manu of the Scheduled Castes was out to destroy their hegemony. Needless to say, the Maharaja of Baroda, Ambedkar's benefactor, was very much impressed by his performance at the Round Table Conference.

On his return from London, he addressed a conference at Nasik (March 10, 1931), at which he exhorted the audience never to abandon the struggle for social equality and freedom by lawful and constitutional means. What is deplorable here is that when the depressed-class people of Nasik took out a procession, they were greeted and pelted with stones. Resenting this atrocious behaviour of the caste Hindus and their continuing imprudence, they now thought it advisable to change their religion—to be converted. A good deal more wary and circumspect than any of these people, Ambedkar advised them not to be so hasty.

He was not disappointed in the fruit his efforts were beginning to bear. The social and political scenario was now reverberating with his clarion call: "Down with brahmanism! Down with the hegemony of the upper-caste elites!"

It was in the same month, March 1931, that the government threw open the police department for recruitment of the depressed classes. In April Ambedkar noted the disappointing fact that Mohamud (M.N. Roy) had not done justice to the untouchables by ignoring their age-old problems. If he had, it would certainly have had the psychological compensation of giving the morale

of the depressed classes a boost, but he seemed to be as credulous as the caste Hindus. Ambedkar did not at this date disclaim religious disputations, and had no hesitation in setting his own opinion against the whole body of putrid Hindu laws and customs, where they conflicted with the interest and welfare of the teeming millions of the dalits. He knew that there was plenty of theological rubbish he did not subscribe to: he believed in equality, for instance; that the Hindu philology, right or wrong, had remained where Panini and Katyayana had left it; that Hindu philosophy, right or wrong, had remained where Kapila and Gautama had left it; and that Hindu literature had remained where Vyasa and Valmiki had left it. "In the domain of science, arts and crafts," he observes, "the contribution of the Hindu Civilization is of the most primitive character. Except in some spheres such as weaving, spinning, etc., the Hindu Civilization has not evolved any technical equipment which can aid man in his struggle against nature to make a bare living that can be said to be higher than that of the brute. It is because of the complete absence of scientific and technical equipment and with all the transcendental nonsense that is being perpetrated that famines are desolating the land in all ages. Ignorance, superstition and disease which affect the mind, malaria and plague diseases which affect the body, have hung like a pall over the country throughout the ages.

"In the field of Religion and Ethics the Hindus have made their greatest efforts. Of their contributions, these are the most elaborately developed. They are undoubtedly the most vital to man for the simple reason that they help to install in man the springs of thought and action. They are responsible for the outlook which man has on life. They are responsible for the attitude one holds towards his fellow man. They prescribe principles which govern conduct, mould character and implant in man that mysterious thing called conscience which acts as his sentinel and prevents him from going wrong.

"It is when one comes to examine this Hindu Civilization in the matter of its religious content, the way of life it prescribes, that one begins to doubt whether Hindu Civilization is at all an advantage to the generations who are fated to inherit it. What does this civilization offer to the 25 millions of Primitive Tribes

who are living on its frontiers? What does it offer to the 5 millions of Criminal Tribes who are living in the midst of that civilization? What does it offer to the 50 millions of Untouchables who are not only living in the midst of that civilization but are required to sustain it? What would the Primitive Tribes say of a civilization which has made no effort to adopt them in its fold? What would the Criminal Tribes say of a civilization which has driven them to take to criminal ways for earning their livelihood? Would it be unjust if they said that this is not Civilization, this is infamy?"<sup>2</sup>

Among the notable events of 1931, Ambedkar's lugubrious encounter with Gandhi is of prime importance; another, no less historically significant, is his participation in the Second Round Table Conference held in September in London. Gandhi and Ambedkar met in Bombay before going to London. A.K. Vakil vividly recalls this encounter: "Gandhi narrated what he did for the untouchables. Ambedkar, who was not the one to yield, opined that in the Congress programme adequate emphasis was not placed on the removal of untouchability as the Congress paid more egregious attention to the production of Khadi. Ambedkar expressed some of the grievances of the Untouchables. He said that the Congress showed apathy towards agitations initiated by the Untouchables. The Untouchables did not oppose the Congress movement but the Congress tried to hinder the Mahad and Nasik Satyagraha. Ambedkar said that the Congress was anxious to be lenient to the Muslims and Sikhs."

Explaining his position, Gandhi said that he held the savarnas and the untouchables inseparable and that he had already spent Rs. 20 lakh on the removal of untouchability. Ambedkar retaliated, saying that with such a huge amount, he could have drastically changed the miserable condition of the untouchables. Instead of giving in, Gandhi invited Ambedkar to join the Congress and to modify its programme. Ambedkar continued to level charge after charge against the Congress, which in fact was directed against Gandhi. Ambedkar felt that Gandhi, who was dictating the Congress policies, expected him to rebuke his disciples and to desist them from opposing the temple-entry programme. Ambedkar chaffed him with: "You, Mr Gandhi, devoted much less time to the cause of the removal

of untouchability than to khadi-making. While you observed three weeks' fast for uniting Hindus and Muslims, to have harmony between the Hindus and the untouchables you did not observe even a day's fast." Ambedkar felt that the Congress was not sincere in removing untouchability and, knowing this, leaders like Swami Shraddhanand had deserted it.

"No doubt the issue of untouchability was significant," adds Vakil, "but in Gandhi's view the problem of poverty and unemployment was more pervasive, and preparing khadi was linked with it. The Indian farmers remained without work for more than four months. The goal of political awakening was to be achieved with this plan. An American professor once conveyed to Gandhi his view that religion should have a capacity to be explained in terms of economics, if one is expected to attach any value to religion. Gandhi agreed with this view. He held that economics was also a form of religion; that exploitation, be it of man, animals or machinery, was irrelevant to it. This outlook broadened the base of his khadi-programme. However, he never underestimated the drive to remove untouchability."<sup>3</sup>

On August 15, 1931 *The Times of India* reported that Dr. Ambedkar tried to impress on Gandhi that the Congress had done nothing considerable so far for ameliorating the plight of the depressed classes and that Gandhi was under a delusion that the depressed classes were all solidly behind him. The report ended with the statement that Ambedkar eventually left without either convincing Gandhi or being convinced by him. He arrived in London fourteen days later for the Second Round Table Conference. The Minorities Committee of the Conference met in September; on October 8, 1931 Dr. Ambedkar signed the Minorities Pact, and on December 5 left for New York to meet his old teachers. The day (January 4, 1932) M.K. Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Patel were arrested and interned in the Yeravada Jail, Dr. Ambedkar returned from New York to London. On his arrival on January 29 at Bombay along with the British members of the Franchise Committee and Shaikat Ali, he received an enthusiastic ovation and in the evening an address in which the depressed-class leaders and people hailed him as a valiant fighter who had 'proved to the hilt our claims for equality of status and treatment'. "But for the valiant fight you put up on our



behalf," the address further added, "our claims would have been ignored." Dr. P.G. Solanki is said to have presided over the meeting.

Ambedkar could spew out hate and abuse when he liked or whenever the occasion called forth such an extreme action. But he often exercised caution and watched—he had a quirk for observation—the fruit of his action ripen dispassionately. That his moves as the revolutionizing centre and prime spokesman of the achuts in those tumultuous times were not all wasted was beginning to be clear when the Raja Moonje Pact was signed in Delhi, a pact which stipulated 'joint-electoralates and reserved seats for the Depressed Classes in proportion to their population'. On August 4, 1932 the Communal Award was announced by the British Premier, giving separate electoralates to the Depressed Classes. Rejecting this award *in toto*, Gandhi decided to fast unto death and wrote, on the day the fast began (20 September, 1932), to P.N. Rajbhoj: "...so far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electoralates would simply vivisect and disrupt it." Four days later Dr. Ambedkar signed with Gandhi the historic Poona Pact, giving up the demand for separate electoralates, and making it possible for Gandhi to end his fast.

Between 1932 and 1956 Ambedkar attended and addressed hundreds of conferences, signed scores of pacts, fought valiantly against the barbarity of social repression and ostracization on several occasions, and "struggled for a rule of law afire with humanist justice in a feudal-colonial society, operating within the parameters of a bourgeoisie happy for centuries with a caste-culture and medieval structure of subordination and indignity."<sup>4</sup> "He was," avers Justice Iyer, "a man with a mission of liberation of man, a single soul thunderbolt which struck at the roots of human bondage, a social militant with the vision of a society of egalitarian compassion, with new dimensions beyond the economic diagnosis of Marxism and political liberty of Mill. The full measure of this indignant, frustrated and iconoclastic humanist is an untold epic because he was against the Establishment, and the Establishment writes the story of our times, moulds the conditioned reflexes of our thinking and fills the ink in the pens of even our highbrow historians. Doing justice to Ambedkar's contribution is therefore more than producing a factual biography

of a public figure. It is the projection on the canvas of India of a sharp critic who could suffer no hypocrisy vis-a-vis marginalised categories and would battle all alone for the holistic humanism of one man, one value.”<sup>5</sup>

In May 1935 Ramabai Ambedkar's death so affected him that at the Yeola conference held on 13 October 1935 he made the epoch-making announcement that he would leave the caste-ridden Hinduism for another religion. He had the misfortune, he said, of being born with the stigma of untouchability which was not his fault but he was determined not to die as a Hindu; that was within his power. He assured those who came to meet him that he would not do anything that might be detrimental to the nation's interest by his conversion, but he wanted to know from them what it was that prevailed on them to hide the hideous face of Hinduism in practice. Spelling out his intention he said that the untouchables should adopt a religion that would promote their progress and that they had Buddhism, Sikhism, and the Arya Samaj before their eyes. Only a month later, on 10 November 1935 a conference of the depressed classes held at Nasik Road resolved to renounce Hindu gods, Hindu scriptures, Hindu priests and pilgrimages and to stop propaganda for temple entry. In January 1936 Ambedkar reiterated his resolve to quit Hinduism and in May released his speech, *The Annihilation of Caste*, prepared for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. It was clear from this that he, like a Buddhist, would be a lamp unto himself, that he would accept nothing on trust and that he would go into everything for himself and satisfy himself intellectually on every point. In his scepticism therefore lay the secret of his denunciation of Hinduism. The Buddha sat cross-legged in his lotus posture in the deepest recesses of his heart. He had already taken refuge in the Buddha.

It was on 31 May 1936 that he delivered his famous speech, *Mukti Kon Pathe*, the burden of which was:

If you must gain self-respect, change your religion;  
 If you deserve independence; change your religion;  
 If you want equality, change your religion;  
 If you wish to create a society that ensures co-operation and  
 brotherhood, change your religion;

If you want power, change your religion; and  
If you wish to make happy the world in which you live,  
change your religion.

But it was not until 14 October 1956 that he along with his wife took the Buddhist vows administered to them by Manasthavira Chandramani at Nagpur. Ambedkar himself administered these vows to the vast assemblage—about seventy-five thousand—of his followers who all embraced Buddhism. As a Buddhist, however, he enjoyed an extremely short span of life. On 15 November 1956 he flew from Patna to Nepal and six days later participated in the World Buddhist Conference at Kathmandu. It was here that his speech on the Buddha and Marx earned him the sobriquet 'Nav Buddha'. Only three weeks later, on 6 December 1956, he died in Delhi. About three and a half decades after his death the grateful nation conferred its highest award, Bharat Ratna, on him in recognition of his truly great contribution to the movement for the liberation of the alienated sections of the Indian society, of the dalits and the achuts. And Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer led a salvo of tributes to 'his Mahar Manu'. "His life," said Iyer, "was a flaming forge, his commitment was to free the ancient unfree, his economics, law and politics were welded into a constitutional militancy and geared to a social emancipation movement. In the last analysis, his constitutionalism toned down his methodology of social liberation, law-breaking or jail-going not being his penchant. Many hold with Aristotle that 'to live by the rule of the Constitution should not be regarded as slavery but rather as salvation'. Was that this patriot's tragic law-abiding failing?"

Even those who would disagree with this evaluation will not demur that he had at least a marked penchant for defending the suppressed, insulated classes "reduced by social injustice to slavery, serfdom, bonded labour and degrees of privation based on inferior birth and other unhappy happenstances." Ambedkar, more than any reformer, had realized the quaintness of the paradox inherent in the fact that "the very original occupants of their native land, the adivasis, are (sic) exiles from the banquet of life, roofless and roaming, destitute and desperate, labouring to build for others but themselves, being unorganised, exploited,

marginalised and even outlawed, had no title to the edifice they built. The five-star culture belongs to the higher castes and the ill-starred torture is the horoscope of the original Indians. The law itself, despite its profession of equal protection, lends learned support for this distortion, promotes the large looter and punishes the little man.”<sup>6</sup>

The events of the second and third phases, though innumerable and variegated, centre round the only goal on which his eyes were set. V.R.K. Iyer’s precis of these events will amply prove Ambedkar’s commitment and dedication to the well-being of the sprawling panchama brood to which millions of outcasts like him belonged. The second phase of life stretching from 1929 to 1936 gave, in the words of Iyer, “a shift in constitutional strategy for his championship of the social underdog in the bonafide, perhaps unsound, political belief that separate electorates for the untouchables would end their thralldom. For him the intractably oppressive Hindu social order could neither be broken nor bent and to quit Hinduism was the social, and to secure separate electorates, the political, hope of overthrowing the inherited burden. Followed, in the third period (1937-46), the purely political organisation of the Indian Labour Party to fight elections and be in office or opposition. His constant motivation was liberation of the down-graded dreg of the Hindu fold. In his most glorious and fruitful spell, he became Law Minister in Free India and simultaneously Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the epochal Constituent Assembly, toiling to level up, through the law of the Constitution and other humane legislations, the lot of the lowly-born and menial masses and of dependant womanhood.” With the dawn of constructive maturity, the learned judge continues, “he abandoned the divisive demand for separate electorates, barricaded, through the articles of the Constitution, and built, through legislative measures, social equality for the trampled weak. All through life his constituency was the weaker sections in his country, his objective was to raise the semi-slave to a new dignity and his achievement was the catalysis of the egalitarian promise that India, that is ours, holds out through law and good government to the lowliest and the lost. In rural India caste and class largely overlapped, untouchables and proletarians were aliases, and so a casteless community

and classless society, modernised and educated, became Ambedkar's ambition. To sum up, the profound thrust of this 'symbol of revolt' was social democracy and the personal impress he left on the legal structure was social justice. This beautiful bequest must be transformed into sociological jurisprudence-in-action and the politics of the social have-nots. History would forgive Ambedkar for his grave errors of political judgement at ominous stages, since his spiritual alibi was that, to the end, he was always morally, sometimes madly, discontented with social vices, practised with scriptural sanction, highbrow hypocrisy and legal connivance."

Ambedkar's biographers find in his work ample material for establishing that on whatever committee he served his actions and speeches converged in his clear commitment to safeguard the interest of the submerged dalit. Since it was a life-time commitment, all his labours were dedicated to achieving that end. The pledge had another significant aspect: to rid the untouchables of the repressive exploitation to which the upper-class Hindus had been subjecting them 'with scriptural sanction, highbrow hypocrisy and legal connivance'. These chosen sons of God lived by other people's work and assumed that they were superior to other people born in other communities and that it was therefore right and proper to rule over them or at least to grab their due meed of labour. In the books admitted to be holy by those who so assumed, there was nothing like 'egalitarian compassion'. In fact such law-givers as Manu had committed a fraud for the sake of those accustomed to live on the sweat and blood of other men, and who therefore had perverted, and still pervert, the rule of law. In reality, according to Ambedkar, oppression is an inevitable result of the existence of casteism; and casteism is only needed by the upper classes to dominate the lowly-born menial masses. The thing is a crime, but the worst of it is that the upper classes, in order to have a plausible basis for their domination of the social underdog, believe that they hold the 'highest religious teachings' known to man (the Hindu śāstras, the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and the Gītā), and that casteism owes its existence to this religious teaching. Ambedkar was inspired by certain ideals not upheld by these śāstras but are similar to those which great souls have always cherished. The

accent in Ambedkar's writings and speeches is always on the law of love and on the well-being of all men. His ideal is best expressed in the following words of Tolstoy:

... what is needed is not to destroy anything, but only to remember that the aim of humanity is the welfare of *all*, and that consequently as soon as any amelioration deprives even a single man of welfare, that amelioration should be abandoned, and not introduced until means are found to produce it and to use it, without infringing the welfare of any single man. And I think that with such a view of life, very many empty and harmful productions would be abandoned, while we should very quickly find means to produce what is really useful without infringing the welfare of any man.

To the upholders of the second view I reply, that humanity in passing from the stone age to the bronze or iron age, and progressing to its present material condition, cannot have made a mistake, but has followed an unalterable law of progress, and to turn back is, I will not say undesirable, but is as impossible as it is for us again to become monkeys; and that the problem for a man of to-day is not to dream about what people used to be like, and how to revert to what they were, but it is—to serve the welfare of men now living. And what is necessary for the welfare of men now living is—that some men should not torment others or oppress them, should not deprive them of the products of their labour, nor compel them to work at things they do not need or may not have; and chiefly that it should not be considered possible or right, for the sake of any practical advantage or material success, to sacrifice the life or welfare of one's neighbour, or, what is the same thing differently expressed, to infringe the law of love.

If people only knew that the aim of humanity is not material progress, but that that progress is an inevitable growth, and that the aim is simply the welfare of all men, and that this aim is superior to any material aim people can set themselves, then everything would fall into its proper place. And it is to this, people of our time should devote all their strength.<sup>7</sup>

What Ambedkar would have objected to in this excerpt is the first opening clause that nothing needs to be destroyed. Intelligent as he was, he knew that the Hindu law-books contained more than derisive remarks about a section of people whom later generations came to regard as achuts. He also knew that the śāstras were more than a sustained glorification of the brāhmaṇas. In sheer disgust he contemptuously highlights the iniquity perpetrated by them and the harm they have caused to the submerged millions of India. He does not advocate the destruction of the śāstras and the brāhmaṇas; his 'primary obsession and aspiration—the bee in his bonnet' was casteism, the destruction of which he strongly proposed in every forum.

That this was 'the bee in his bonnet' is clear from all the important phases of his life (1918-1928; 1929-1936; 1931-1946; 1947-1956). The main contention of Ambedkar throughout these phases is that the brāhmaṇical strategy aiming at perpetuating the Hindu social hierarchy must end, that the Hindu law-books, in fostering casteism, had fostered empty illusions, mad fancies, and airy nothings, the outcome of tricks of strong fancy. And in support of his position he recalls how in the *Purusasūkta* of the *R̥g Veda*, the brāhmaṇa is said to have emanated from the mouth of the primeval man, the kṣatriya from his arms, the vaiśya from his thighs and the śūdra from his feet.<sup>8</sup> He takes considerable pains to show the fantasies of the ancient seers, of the ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads, and of the poet of the *Gītā* and ultimately succeeds in revealing that all these were pathological cases and all these so-called sacred books were monuments to madness.

With a view to estimating Babasaheb's role in the struggle for the emancipation of the depressed classes from the inherited burden, it would be advisable to recall a few more events of the second phase; this is all the more necessary because his achievement, which has evoked as much disapprobation as praise, needs to be judged in perspective. One of the events of far-reaching importance was the setting up of a Statutory Commission in 1927 by the British Government, a Commission made up only of some British members of parliament. As soon as the composition of the Commission was known the radical opinion in India was

dismayed and the Congress and the Liberals decided to boycott it.

In February 1928 a committee under Pandit Motilal Nehru was constituted for the purpose of drafting a constitution for India. The Committee's report, officially known as the Report of the Committee Appointed by the Conference to Determine the Principles of the Constitution for India, was produced in 1928 and was popularly called the Nehru Report. In the opinion of the Committee the problem of the untouchables was indeed social or religious rather than political. "The Congress," the report said, 'made abolition of untouchability as one of its principal planks, in 1920; and as it is well-known, Mahatma Gandhi has thrown himself with all his great powers and energy into the movement...In our suggestions for the constitution *we have not made any special provision for the representation of the 'depressed' classes in Legislatures.* This could only be done by way of special electorates or by nomination...We are not prepared to extend this unsound and harmful principle, if we can help it, nor do we think that we will do any good to these classes by ensuring some seats for them in this way."<sup>9</sup> The report regretted that the solicitude of the government had brought little relief to the depressed or suppressed classes and that it had given them some nominated seats in the legislatures and some minor conditions for special schools.

As was expected, Ambedkar spoke out against the Nehru Report, against all manifestations of the upper-class elitism, describing the report as 'brāhmanical strategy' which aimed at 'perpetuating the Hindu social hierarchy in their struggle for political power'. He goes on to question the legality and tenability of the report, finally dismissing it as a move to perpetuate brāhmaṇism.

Dr. Ambedkar's statement submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission, bearing the rather long caption of 'Statement Concerning the Safeguards for the Protection of the Interests of the Depressed Classes as a Minority in the Bombay Presidency, and the Changes in the Composition of and the Guarantees from the Bombay Legislative Council Necessary to Ensure the same under Provincial Autonomy,' and demanding protection for the depressed classes



through adequate representation, expressed his view that population is a measure by which one can evaluate the representation that is to be granted to any community. "The standing of a community," he said, "is no less an important factor to be taken into account in determining its quota of representation...There can be no two opinions that the standing of the depressed classes, both educational and economical, is the lowest in this Presidency." Ambedkar, therefore, demanded a number of concessions and safeguards for 'the inarticulate masses of the population': "That the education of the Depressed classes shall be recognised as the first charge on the revenues of the province...That the right of the Depressed classes to unrestricted recruitment in the army, navy, and the police shall be recognised without any limitation as to caste. That for a period of 30 years the right of the Depressed classes for priority in the matter of the recruitments to all posts, gazetted as well as non-gazetted, in all civil services, shall be recognised. That the right of the Depressed classes to effective representation on the Local Bodies shall be recognised by the Provincial Government..."

The animating motive of his struggle throughout may be said to have been his conviction that the depressed classes constituted a distinct minority, separate from the Hindus. In his evidence before the Indian Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) on 23 October 1928, Ambedkar made it clear that the minority character of these enslaved masses had been concealed by their inclusion in the Hindu community. As a matter of fact, he added, there is really no link between the depressed classes and the upper-caste Hindu community. He stressed therefore that the depressed underdog must be regarded as a member of a distinct and independent minority. Secondly, he urged that this minority of 'the down-graded dreg' needed far greater political protection than any other minority in British India. He gave for it "the simple reason that it is educationally very backward, that it is economically poor, socially enslaved, and suffers from certain grave political disabilities, from which no other community suffers."<sup>10</sup> As a matter of demand for the political protection of the depressed masses, he claimed representation on the same basis as the Muslim minority. "We claim reserved seats," he declared, "if accompanied by adult franchise." When

questioned: if there is no adult franchise? Ambedkar answered that in that case they would demand safeguards either in the constitution, if possible, or "else in the way of advice in the instrument to the Governor regarding the education of the depressed classes and their entry into the public services." Here the dialogue between the Commission and Dr. Ambedkar assumes considerable interest and deserves reproduction *in extenso*:

38. Would it be convenient if I asked a question or two on these points as we go? You claim that the depressed class, although included within Hinduism in a sense, should none the less be regarded from the point of view of the constitution as a distinct and separate community from others who are within Hinduism?

Dr. Ambedkar: Yes.

39. Is that on the ground that in your view the depressed classes cannot expect to have their interests satisfactorily represented by the higher ranks of Hinduism?

Dr. Ambedkar: That is one ground, but [as] a matter of fact, really we cannot be deemed to be part of the Hindu community.

40. You come, I believe from an earlier set of inhabitants of this continent?

Dr. Ambedkar: That is one view, I think.

41. It is supposed—we will not go into detail—that you are Pre-Aryan?

Dr. Ambedkar: Well, I do not know. That is a view...

43. I only ask you the question because there are some very distinguished Hindu public men—I do not mention any names—who have undoubtedly exhibited a good deal of interest in the case of the depressed classes. There is no question about that?

Dr. Ambedkar: Yes, there is a great deal of public talk.

44. I know; but, at any rate, that is your view: you say you must be regarded as a distinct and

separate community from the constitutional point of view ?

Dr. Ambedkar: Yes.

45. As regards representation, I notice that whether there is adult franchise, or whether there is not adult franchise, you seem to be abandoning any idea of nomination, you want election ?

Dr. Ambedkar: Yes. ...

71. You are particularly anxious to get appointments in the public service ?

Dr. Ambedkar: Yes, decidedly.

72. Why is that so ?

Dr. Ambedkar: On that point I should like to say this, that our experience so far as the administration of the law is concerned is very bitter. I wish to say most emphatically that in many cases the law is administered to the disadvantage of the depressed-class man. I would like to give a concrete case of what actually happened in one of the districts, without, of course, mentioning names. The Bombay Government annually lets out its forest lands for cultivation to the villages on certain stated terms. Now we discovered that in the allotment of those forest lands the depressed class man, who was often a landless labourer or with very little land, and who was clamouring for some sort of economic stability, never came in for a share. The Mamlatdars, who were really in charge of distributing the lands, showed absolute favouritism to the caste Hindu as against the depressed class man. Last year in one district we organised and sent a deputation to the Assistant Deputy Collector of that district, placing before him our grievances with respect to these forest lands. He issued a circular to the Mamlatdars saying that the applications from the depressed classes should be considered. Now, some of the Mamlatdars, to show they were acting up to the circular, did give some lands

to the depressed classes. But we found that they rather fooled us, if I may say so. What they did was, on paper they allotted a very large amount of land to the depressed classes and a very small amount of land to the caste Hindus, but when we came to see actually what was allotted to us we found that the land allotted to the depressed classes was all rocky and unfit for cultivation and the depressed-class people would not take it for anything, and the land allotted to the caste Hindus though small, was all rich and fertile. Now I think that is a most flagrant abuse of the administrative power which is entrusted to the officials, and I personally attach far more importance to good administration of law than to more efficient administration of law.

73. Chairman: I imagine that the application of what you have told us, which is interesting, to our present inquiry is really this—because, of course, it is no part of the function of this Commission to interfere in day-by-day administration ?

Dr. Ambedkar No.

74. You are using it as an argument to support your view that the depressed classes should have a full representation.

Dr. Ambedkar: In the services.

75. That is your point ?

Dr. Ambedkar: That is my point. I will give some instances of what happens in judicial courts actually in this Presidency. I happened to defend a depressed class man in one of the courts, and, to my great surprise, I found that the man had to stand outside the court behind a little window, outside the wall, and he would not come in simply because, he said, "It is all right so far as you are concerned, but after you have left there will be terrible social ostracism if I enter the court."

76. It was the client who did not want to come in ?

Dr. Ambedkar: Who dare not come in.

77. What sort of social ostracism had he in mind ?

Dr. Ambedkar: The social ostracism would be that if he went back to the village there would be the boycott of the shop-keepers; nobody would sell him grain. The villagers would stop his dues as a village servant. He would not be allowed to come into the village. The depressed class people always live on the border of the village, not in the centre or in the midst...<sup>11</sup>

Ambedkar's depth of intellectual vision enabled him to foresee, perhaps more clearly than any other man of his age, the growing danger of reducing a Legislative Council to the position of a mere museum in which so many specimens of so many communities are kept or of accepting the principle of representation of minorities according to population of the legislature. It was not at all in the fitness of things, he said, to confine the minority to proportional representation according to population. Such a step if taken would mean that "you are condemning a minority to be perpetually a minority without the power necessary to influence the actions in the majority."

Such depositions, arguments, and pleadings reveal that Ambedkar as the leader of the backward classes was aware of his social and political strength; he had learnt the value of adult suffrage; he had learnt the value of personal liberty, although the mass of those for whom he was fighting only hazily recognized the importance of liberty and equality—of self-government. Gandhi had already enunciated the principle that the Congress did not want to safeguard the interest of a particular group of people but that it stood for all the poor masses.<sup>12</sup> There was a growing conviction that government for the good of the many, rather than for the good of the upper-caste minority, was essential to the growth of a healthy and prosperous society. Government for the good of a single caste, however high or elitist, which failed to safeguard the interest of all, especially of the enslaved masses, was certain to prove sooner or later an intolerable burden which had no right whatever to

rule. Ambedkar acknowledged it to be the duty of a true egalitarian to do away with untouchability and the bewildering multiplicity of castes and to seek the establishment of a society free from inexorable caste rules with educational facilities for one and all. He had no faith in forming enclosed social units or in parcelling into bits of a larger cultural unit; he believed in the liberation of the depressed classes as sincerely as he believed in the propriety of liquidating all fissiparous systems, including the system of caste 'as a consequence of the virtue of self-duplication that is inherent in it'.<sup>13</sup> The future development of the country depended, in Ambedkar's view, on the establishment of an egalitarian society in which there are no dalits and achuts. Unfortunately, however, such a society had been only a dream. We still had, Ambedkar felt while deposing before the Simon Commission, miles to go and promises to keep. Justice, social, economic, and political, had yet to be achieved. Unless a man championed great principles, and applied them to the problem without fear of forfeiting popular favour, he wasted breath and ink. Ambedkar had no intention of winning cheap popularity or sacrificing his personal ideals and principles in order to placate the members of the Commission. However biasedly he may have diagnosed the situation, he had no doubt about the rationale of his stance on the question of adult suffrage. He was eager to derive social profit for his people from any turn of the political wheel. Though with the singular versatility that characterized him, he, amid all the bustle of the political world in which he had immersed himself, found time to pursue his true vocation. There was no doubt in his mind that personal profit must be subordinated to the larger profit of those millions of starving people who had been enduring humiliation from time immemorial. The patita must be liberated by special political strategies if possible. "Be that as it may," Ambedkar is said to have realized, "there is no doubt whatever that it is fundamental that a casteless, classless society free from material, moral and spiritual disabilities" be our founding creed and let us act upon it.<sup>14</sup>

Underlying his castigation of the endogamous organization of the Hindu society is Ambedkar's awareness of the harm done by the existence of castes. As each caste constitutes a closed unit and lives by antogony, it does not allow others not born in it to

its membership, nor does it allow anyone from outside to be brought into it. The Hindu society, according to Ambedkar, is a federation of self-enclosed castes in which there is no place for the convert because no caste will admit him. "The answer to the question why the Hindu Religion ceased to be a missionary religion is to be found in the fact that it developed the caste system. Caste is incompatible with conversion. So long as mass conversion was possible, the Hindu Society could convert, for the converts were large enough to form a new caste which could provide the elements of a social life from among themselves. But when mass conversions were no more and only individual converts could be had, the Hindu Religion had necessarily to cease to be missionary, for its social organisation could make no room for the incoming convert."<sup>15</sup>

That the caste system has sapped the strength of the Hindu society and brought about its fragmentation is shown by those numerous instances where a solid organized band of fanatics has routed a large army of disorganized Hindus. In fact the Hindus are beaten not only where they are numerically weak, but they yield to their adversaries even where they preponderate. Instances can be multiplied to show that the Hindus suffer not from want of numbers but from want of solidarity. To increase solidarity of the Hindu society one must tackle the forces of disintegration. The Hindu society must be integrated. Mere *śudhi* will cause greater disintegration. "Now the greater the castes the greater the isolation and the greater the weakness of the Hindu society. If the Hindu society desires to survive it must think not of adding to its numbers but increasing its solidarity and that means the abolition of caste. The abolition of castes is the real Sanghathan of the Hindus and when Sanghathan is achieved by the abolishing of castes, *śudhi* will be unnecessary and if practised, will be gainful of real strength. With the castes in existence, it is impossible and if practised would be harmful to the real Sanghathan and solidarity of the Hindus. But somehow the most revolutionary and ardent reformer of the Hindu society shies at the idea of abolition of the caste and advocates such puerile measures as the reconversion of the converted Hindu, the changing of the diet and the starting of Akhadas. Some day it will dawn upon the Hindus that they cannot save their society and

also preserve their caste. It is to be hoped that that day is not far off."<sup>16</sup>

With characteristic impetuosity Ambedkar turned to voice his concern for the dalits. He found an appropriate forum in the Round Table Conferences held in London in the years 1930-1932. He was bent on drumming his problem into the ears of the British rulers as well as into those of the other participants. It was their duty, he argued, promptly to redress the age-old sufferings of the depressed classes. He did not plead for reforms here and there but for radical restructuring, a revolutionary end to slavery.

The three Round Table Conferences provided effective fora in which Ambedkar's participation left no doubt that the problem of the Hindu underdog had come to absorb all his being. He was resolute. He would not let the question sleep. The time arranged itself on his side. At length, the members, the leaders, the nation as a whole was forced to yield to popular clamour and Ambedkar won half a battle almost single handed.

The first Round Table Conference was held from November 12, 1930 to January 19, 1931; the second from September 7, 1931 to December 1, 1931; and the third from November 17, 1932 to December 24, 1932. The depressed classes were represented at these conferences by Dr. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan. Voicing the viewpoint of 43,000,000 people, or one-fifth of the total population of British India in the Plenary Session, whose fifth sitting was held on November 20, 1930, Ambedkar once again reiterated that the depressed classes formed a group by themselves, that, although they were included among the Hindus, they in no sense formed an integral part of that community. There are communities in India, Ambedkar lamented, which occupy a lower and inferior position but the position assigned to the depressed classes is one which is midway between that of the serfs and the slaves, and which may be called servile with this difference that, while the serf and the slave were permitted to have physical contact, the depressed-classes are debarred. Untouchability, therefore, involves not merely the possibility of discrimination in public life, but actually implies a positive denial of equality of opportunity and of all civic rights. The present "bureaucratic form of Government in India," Ambedkar



further declared, "should be replaced by a Government which will be a Government of the people, by the people and for the people."

Here Ambedkar's tone, hitherto critical with a tinge of bitterness in it, becomes placatory and the statements, based on half-truths, are unlike him:

The tie that bounds (sic) the Depressed Classes to the British has been of a unique character. The Depressed Classes welcomed the British as their deliverers from age-long tyranny and oppression by the orthodox Hindus. They fought their battles against the Hindus, the Mussalmans and the Sikhs and won for them this great Empire of India. The British, on their side, assumed the role of trustees for the depressed classes. In view of such an intimate relationship between the parties, this change in the attitude of the depressed classes towards British Rule in India is undoubtedly a most momentous phenomenon.<sup>17</sup>

What he said at this conference reflected his resolve to devote his career to the service of the depressed people. Putting no small strain on his youthful faculties, he had carried on the fight and had thrown himself into his work with unsurpassed vigour and enthusiasm—with more vigour indeed than was habitual to the hardened politician. He would do more than the mere bloodless work which politics required of him. He would defy any leader if he appeared hostile to the depressed classes as well as adopt a conciliatory attitude when diplomacy demanded. He endeavoured to influence the commission by the forcefulness of his words and by plain dealing. It was no indiscretion on the part of a representative which was likely to breed misunderstanding or dissatisfaction. He gave reasons for the change of attitude towards the British rulers:

But the reasons for this change of attitude are not far to seek. We have not taken this decision simply because we wish to throw in our lot with the majority. Indeed, as you know, there is not much love lost between the majority and the particular minority I represent. Ours is an independent

decision. We have judged of the existing administration solely in the light of our own circumstances and we have found it wanting in some of the most essential elements of a good Government. When we compare our present position with the one which it was our lot to bear in Indian society of the pre-British days, we find that, instead of marching on, we are only marking time. Before the British, we were in the loathsome condition due to our untouchability. Has the British Government done anything to remove it? Before the British, we could not enter the temple. Can we enter now? Before the British, we were denied entry into the Police Force. Does the British Government admit us in the Force? Before the British, we were not allowed to serve in the Military. Is that career now open to us?<sup>18</sup>

To none of these questions, Ambedkar avers, the British Government could give an affirmative answer. The grievances of the depressed masses could not be redressed unless they got political power in their own hands. Only in a Swaraj constitution they could have a chance of getting the political power without which they could not bring salvation to the oppressed people.

Explaining why he had not used the expression 'Dominion Status' in placing before the conference the point of view of the depressed classes, he observed that his chief ground for not using it was that it did not convey the full content of what the depressed classes stood for. "It must be recognised," he added, "that Indian Society is a gradation of Castes forming an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt—a system which gives no scope for the growth of that sentiment of equality and fraternity so essential for a democratic form of Government. It must also be recognized that while the intelligentsia is a very important part of Indian society, it is drawn from its upper strata and although it speaks in the name of the country and leads the political movement, it has not shed the narrow particularism of the class from which it is drawn. In other words what the Depressed Classes wish to urge is that the political mechanism must take account of and must have a definite relation to the psychology of the society for which it is devised. Otherwise you are likely to produce a constitution

which, however symmetrical, will be [a] truncated one and a total misfit to the society for which it is designed.”<sup>19</sup>

Taking strong exception to the view that the problem of the depressed classes is exclusively a social problem and that its solution lies elsewhere than in politics, Ambedkar held that the problem of the depressed classes would never be solved unless they got political power in their own hands. The problem, he submitted, was eminently a political problem and must be treated as such. Although the idea of Swaraj recalled to the mind of many the tyrannies, oppressions and injustices practised upon the outcastes in the past and fear of their recurrence under Swaraj, they were, said Ambedkar, prepared to take the inevitable risk of the situation in the hope that they would be installed, in adequate proportion, as the political sovereigns of the country as well as their fellow countrymen. His only condition was that the settlement of the problems of the depressed classes be not delayed or left to time, for they had ‘waited too long for the time to work its miracle’.

Ambedkar’s defence of the oppressed millions of the country in the various sub-committees has to be viewed in its proper perspective. His speeches centre round the theme of emancipation from the casteist curse of untouchability. “We must be emancipated,” he declares on December 31, 1930 in the Sub-Committee No. III, “from this social curse before we can at all consent to the constitution; and secondly, this fundamental right must also invalidate and nullify all such disabilities and all such discriminations as may have been made hitherto. Next, we want legislation against the social persecution to which I have drawn your attention...”<sup>20</sup>

His devotion to the cause of the patita shed its glow over all his interests, his speeches, and his writings. But his most active energies were absorbed by his heroic fight for the emancipation of his submerged people from ‘the untenable communal iniquities which marred Hindu India and even infected other religions’. The truth is that his soul rebelled against the obscurantist views to which the doctrines of Hinduism were committed. No truce was possible between Ambedkar and one who failed to realize that the semi-slave must now be ‘lifted by special strategies of compassionate equalisation’. Ambedkar retaliated with spirit.

Turning the tables on the offending caste Hindus, he set to work on an enlightened defence of a casteless social order. The speeches and arguments contained in 'Dr. Ambedkar at the Round Table Conferences'<sup>21</sup> embody his firmest convictions on the problems faced by the dalit masses and on the solution of the problems. Ambedkar did much more than spell out the problems; he offered what he believed to be their permanent solution as well in the light of 'the dynamic trinity of values the Buddha had inculcated', namely, *prajñā*, *karuṇā*, and *saṃatā*. For this, as Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer has pointed out, the new Manu had to tear down 'the decadent *Mānusmṛiti* where four-fold division of humanity hierarchically was sanctified'.

## NOTES

1. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Future*, p. 5.
2. *W.S.*, Vol. 5, pp. 137-38.
3. A.K. Vakil, *Gandhi Ambedkar Dispute* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 8-9.
4. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
5. *Ibid.*
6. V.R. Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
7. Leo Tolstoy, *Essays, and Letters* (Guilford, 1904), pp. 174-75.
8. "In point of time the *Puruṣasūkta* version may be scribed to the end of the period of the *Atharva Veda*, in which it occurs in the latest position, which may be as late as 800 B.C." R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras in Ancient India*.
9. Quoted by K.N. Kadam, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Significance of his Movement* (Bombay, 1988), pp. 26-27.
10. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, p. 465.
11. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, pp. 465-66, 468-69.
12. A.K. Vakil, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
13. K.L. Chanchreek and Saroj Prasad, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar*, p. 19.
14. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
15. *S.W.*, Vol. V, p. 424.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 425.
17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 504.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 506.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 532.
21. Part III of Vol. 2, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*.

## 5

### *The Congress in the Dock*

The clue to Ambedkar's moves and calculations in London was that he was out to derive from the Sub-Committees as many concessions for the depressed-class people as possible, and end both the high-brow ascendancy of the caste Hindus in the services and the servility of the submerged masses which kept them on a tightrope financially. He sought to free them from economic dependence, to ensure equality based on humanity irrespective of caste hierarchy, and to improve the social position of the hitherto marginalized dalit. His recommendations in the Sub-Committee No. VIII relating to services are noteworthy in this connection. To muster support for his views, he argued forcefully that the social standard of the depressed classes was lower than that of ordinary human beings, that they had in certain matters no right at all, and, where they had any, the majority community did not allow them to enjoy it. He brought home to the committee that although the minorities were all in the same boat, yet they were not all in the same class in the same boat. He feared, Ambedkar pleaded, that under any future constitution by which a majority rule would be established, that majority rule would be the rule of the orthodox Hindus. In that case there was great danger of that majority with its orthodox Hindu beliefs and prejudices contravening the dictates of justice, equality and good conscience. Continuing, Ambedkar also drew the committee's attention to the great danger that the minorities might be discriminated against either in legislation or administration or in the other public rights of citizenship. It was, therefore, necessary to safeguard the position of the minorities in such a manner that the much-feared discrimination did not take

place. "From that point of view, however," he said, "what is asked is that the minorities shall have representation in the Legislature and the Executive, that they shall have representation in the public services of the country, and that the constitution shall provide that there shall be imposed on the future legislatures of India, both Central and Provincial, certain limitations on their legislative power which will prevent the majorities from abusing their legislative power in such a manner as to enact laws which would create discrimination between one citizen and another. I say, this circumstance—this danger of discrimination is common to all minorities, and I, as a representative of the Depressed Classes, join with the demand which the other minorities have made in this regard."<sup>1</sup>

It was to the question of the representation of the minorities in the legislature, in the executive, and in the public services of the country that Ambedkar addressed his words; in his political writings on the disabilities of the depressed classes, he was really statesmanlike. He urged the necessity of realizing and removing the difficulty the depressed classes faced in getting themselves accommodated in public sarais when they were travelling. There were numerous other hardships as well, one of the most distressing being the difficulty they faced in being taken in an omnibus when going from one place to another. Then there was the hardship they suffered in securing entry to public schools to the establishment of which they had themselves contributed. Last but by no means least was their difficulty in drawing water from a well for the building of which they had paid taxes. "The one circumstance," Ambedkar continued, "which distinguishes the position of the Depressed Classes from that of the other minorities is that they suffer from civic disabilities which are as effective as though they were imposed by law."<sup>2</sup>

Ambedkar understood both law and politics. In London he was for a period, immersed in politics and showed the mentality and spirit of a militant giant. Even the sympathetic Gandhi, a greater name and a veteran politician, failed to see the significance of some of Ambedkar's pleas. What Ambedkar said in this sub-committee was plain and simple, but forceful and effective. It was not profound, it was well-argued and comprehensive; that was the whole point of it, to appeal to as wide a

front as possible, a fusion of all arguments against the dangers and fears experienced by the depressed classes.

Ambedkar also stressed the fear of being in a very small minority with whatever representation the depressed classes might be granted in the new legislature. There was, therefore, always the danger of the interests of these people being neglected altogether, or some action taken which might ultimately prove to be prejudicial to their interests. What the depressed classes wanted and what Ambedkar strove to achieve is best expressed in the following words:

As against these special circumstances which affect the Depressed Classes, we propose the following safeguards. First of all, we want a fundamental right enacted in the constitution which will declare "untouchability" to be illegal for all public purposes. We must be emancipated, so to say, from this social curse before we can at all consent to the constitution; and secondly, this fundamental right must also invalidate and nullify all such disabilities and all such discriminations as may have been made hitherto. Next, we want legislation against the social persecution to which I have drawn your attention just now, and for this we have provided in the document which we have submitted by certain clauses which are based upon an Act, which now prevails in Burma. I need not go into that detail just for the moment. Then what we want is this, that liability of the executive officers of the Crown for acts of tyranny or oppression shall be made effective. Today under sections 110 and 111 of the Government of India Act that liability is not real. And lastly, what we want is a right to appeal against acts of neglect or prejudice to the Central Government and failing that, to the Secretary of State and a Special Department in the Government of India to take charge of our welfare.<sup>3</sup>

In the Sub-Committee No. VI Ambedkar puts forward his views on adult suffrage. But no less important than these are his views on Indian society. If we are interested in discovering how much Ambedkar knew of this society, it would repay us to look closely at the proceedings of this sub-committee.<sup>4</sup> He was obliged to

admit that under the existing franchise the depressed masses were nowhere at all in the electorate. They were deprived of elementary freedom and rights; they underwent the most cruel oppression and exploitation and suffered starvation and lack of rights. Therefore, they were burning with enthusiasm to wipe out all traces of feudalism and build a new casteless and classless India. It was the wish of the entire depressed people to carry out an anti-casteist, anti-feudal revolution and build a society based on equality, fraternity and liberty. The entire people who have had experienced maltreatment and racial oppression at the hands of the privileged classes demanded the building of a new society which would guarantee them—especially the untouchables—free activity and enable them to develop a truly national culture and national education.

Elaborating his contention that under the existing franchise the depressed classes are nowhere in the electorate, Ambedkar describes such a franchise as a most disgraceful thing. He reminds us that Indian society comprises a number of castes and creeds which are not related to one another in the 'vertical perpendicular', as a result of which, "if you chop-off this mass at any particular point you get a part which is representative of all the communities in an equal degree. On the other hand, if I may put it so, they are related in such a manner that the parallel grains are, so to speak, placed horizontally one on the other, so that if you chop at any particular point you get a part which is representative of one single community only or at the most two, and the rest are not represented at all. Now surely you do not want to create a system of political Government in which only some castes and some communities will predominate. Surely you do not want to create in India a South Africa where only some people will have the vote and the rest will not."<sup>5</sup> In order that every man may have a vote and the political franchise, so that he may work out his own destiny, then no other system or franchise in India could be adopted than that of adult suffrage. If on the other hand a franchise of literacy were adopted, the effect of it would be, argues Ambedkar, that some communities would have their voting strength almost doubled, while other communities in which the literacy level was touching its nadir would stand where they were. Summing up his arguments in favour of adult



suffrage, he submits "that if this Conference and the members who are assembled round this table are true to their creed, believe that India must have responsible Government, and that Government must be responsible to the people, then I submit there is no alternation to adult suffrage."<sup>6</sup>

This was in effect a refutation of the then accepted belief that democracy of illiterates is like a house built on shaky foundations, if not a house of cards. Ambedkar also repudiated the idea of joint electorates and declared with all the force at his command that he was not going to allow the majority to select his candidate. "I am not," he declared unequivocally, "going to place myself under the thumb and authority of any majority Government, unless I am certain that I can exercise in the elections electoral power which is commensurate with my social power. Unless I know that every man and every woman in the Depressed Class community will be able to exercise the vote and to determine the destiny of the candidate who is going to represent the mass of people in the country, I certainly am not going to consent to joint electorates; certainly not."<sup>7</sup>

The ticklish question of reservation, its accentuation, and its far-reaching political importance are correctly traced to Ambedkar's unceasing struggle for the uplift of his community. As its unchallenged leader and spokesman, he had been emphasizing that seats should be reserved for the depressed classes in the legislatures and that the existing practice of nominating one or two members must be done away with. What he claimed was precisely this: the depressed backwards should have no less than 22 out of 140 seats in the Bombay Legislative Council. Adding two more claims, he said that he would have reservation of seats as well as adult suffrage, and in the absence of such an arrangement, separate electorates. In his view adult suffrage would counter mischief, if any. The very fact that he along with Rao Bahadur Srinivasan represented the depressed classes, Ambedkar remarked, was indeed a recognition of the independent position of these classes. One of his suggestions to which considerable importance is attached was that the untouchables should be christened 'non-caste' Hindus, 'Protestant' Hindus, or 'non-conformist' Hindus. The reason he submitted for such a nomenclature was that the untouchables constituted a class

separate from Hindus in that they were on a level between serfs and slaves. With a view to usurping their rights the Hindus looked upon them as their men. An indomitable fighter for the rights of his people, Ambedkar thought of taking their problem to the League of Nations and of drawing the world's attention to the invidious hierarchical caste system of the Hindus.

In a society in which the savarna Hindus had reserved for themselves all socio-political power, only the ability to bear life and nurture it from their own bodies remained the exclusive privilege of the downtrodden classes. Even Gandhi did not include the banishment of the Hindu varna structure in his programmes as he included the abolition of untouchability or as he stressed the importance of the harijans' title to temple entry. As a matter of fact, Ambedkar played a higher and nobler role in the emancipation of the suppressed classes—"the backwardmost brackets"—than any of the then Indian leaders, including Gandhi. "When the pre-Independence saga of India comes to be written," observes Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer,

only prejudice can assign a higher role in the liberation of the backwardmost brackets to anyone above Ambedkar. While both Gandhi and Ambedkar were symbols of the revolt against the caste-conscious oppressors within the Hindu fold, they chose different paths, different strategies and different ideologies. If Gandhi was a deliverer of Indians, including the weakest sector, from the British Raj, Ambedkar was the spearhead of Black Power against the varna front. There were many issues on which the two militant giants would not agree for the obvious reason that Gandhiji wanted reform to end injustice, while Ambedkar demanded rebellion for the annihilation of the caste system itself.<sup>8</sup>

Brainwashed by elitist historians we are taught in some cases to think of Gandhi as a liberator of the śūdras, but Ambedkar played a nobler role when he fought for the abolition of the very varna structure which had given birth to śūdrahood and untouchability. The savarnas deemed of the highest class had been the cynosure of the social eye for immemorial ages and had perpetuated the endogamous varna system. A mahar patriot as he was,

Ambedkar revolted against this inhuman system which was, to him, the root of all evil in India. Says Iyer:

Gandhi was a Vyasa and insisted on eradication of shudrahood and untouchability. Ambedkar was a mahar and indignantly insisted on the abolition of the varna structure, thereby levelling up all castes into one oceanic unity or human *sagara*. Ambedkar was a historic necessity, a dialectical demand if social democracy was to be India's desideratum. It was, and he became the symbol of social liberation of Depressed Classes and of Womanhood. He joined Government to advance the cause and quit it when he was betrayed from within. The fire of this *mahar* was rare in the Indian public life of his time.<sup>9</sup>

Shocked that the dalit classes constituted a minority which came next to the Muslim minority in the country, and yet was its social standard lower than that of ordinary human beings, one of Ambedkar's political goals was to let them have certain civic rights which other minorities by law enjoyed. It was with this end in view that he set himself to eradicate their disabilities. He therefore demanded a complete partition between the oppressed classes and the Hindus. "We have been called Hindus for political purposes," he confessed, "but we have never been acknowledged socially by the Hindus as their brethren."

In the Minorities Committee, the seventh sitting of which was held on 28 September 1931, Ambedkar's role was nothing less than historic; it was astonishingly challenging and spirited. He began on a devastating note and questioned even the authority of one who was embedded in the Hindu psyche as a kind of demi-god.<sup>10</sup> He made it clear that those who were negotiating were not plenipotentiaries at all nor was Gandhi or the Congress in a position to bind those for whom he—Ambedkar—spoke. He said this most emphatically in the meeting. He had no quarrel with the question whether any particular community got weightage or not, but he did want to say most forcefully that whoever claimed weightage and whoever was willing to give that weightage he must not—and cannot—give it out of the depressed-class share.

On October 1, 1931 in the course of the eighth sitting of the Minorities Committee Ambedkar announced that unless he knew at the outset that the depressed classes were going to be recognized as a community entitled to political recognition in the future Constitution of India, it would not serve his purpose to join the particular committee that was proposed by Gandhi to be constituted to go into this matter. He expressed his reluctance to support the proposition for adjournment or to wholeheartedly co-operate with the committee that was going to be nominated unless he had an assurance that that committee would start with the assumption that all those communities which the Minorities Sub-Committee recommended previous year as fit for recognition of India would be included.

The deliberations held on October 8, 1931 in the ninth sitting of the Minorities Committee surfaced the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi regretted that he was believed to have opposed any representation of the untouchables on the legislature. This was, he said, a travesty of truth. What he had said, and what he was forced to reiterate, was that he was opposed to their special representation, for he was convinced that it could do them no good. The Mahatma claimed that the Congress was wedded to adult franchise and that therefore millions of the untouchables could be placed on the voters' roll. It was inconceivable, added Gandhi, that, with untouchability fast disappearing, nominees of these voters could be boycotted by the others. In his view what those people needed more than election to the legislatures was protection from social and religious persecution. He himself was aware of the tyranny of custom which had brought a large section of the populace to a degradation of which every thinking Hindû had need to feel ashamed and to do penance. "I should, therefore," he went on, "have the most drastic legislation rendering criminal all the special persecution to which these fellow-countrymen of mine are subjected by the so-called superior classes. Thank God, the conscience of Hindus has been stirred, and untouchability will soon be a relic of our sinful past."<sup>11</sup>

Ambedkar had no difficulty in showing up Gandhi who had made a speech and a comment that caused exasperation. Ambed-

kar was sorry on this occasion to see that Gandhi was guilty of a breach of understanding. To quote him verbatim,

What disturbs me after hearing Mr. Gandhi is that instead of confining himself to his proposition, namely, that the Minorities Committee should adjourn *sine die*, he started casting certain reflections upon the representatives of the different communities who are sitting round this table. He said that the Delegates were nominees of the Government, and that they did not represent the views of their respective communities for whom they stood. We cannot deny the allegation that we are nominees of the Government, but, speaking for myself, I have not the slightest doubt that even if the Depressed Classes of India were given the chance of electing their representatives to this Conference, I would, all the same, find a place here. I say therefore that, whether I am a nominee or not, I fully represent the claims of my community. Let no man be under any mistaken impression as regards that.<sup>12</sup>

This reveals two things: first, Ambedkar had no difficulty in establishing his bona fides and, secondly, he was often, as here, devastatingly frank. He had the greatness to recognize the greatness in another man, but when it came to defending a legitimate stand, he would not budge or compromise.

The most important story about this conference was Ambedkar's row with Gandhi over the latter's claim that the Congress stood for the depressed classes and that it represented these classes more than Ambedkar himself or his colleagues did. "To that claim," Ambedkar vouched, "I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to those claims have been invariably denying them."<sup>13</sup> In order to prop up his argument Ambedkar refers to a telegram which he had received from a place he had never visited and from a person he had never seen. This man, the President of the Depressed Classes Union, Kumaun, Almora, had sent him a resolution which read as follows: "This meeting declares its no-confidence in the Congress movement which has been carried on in and outside

the country, and condemns the methods adopted by the Congress workers."

Ambedkar knew that although there were sympathizers of the depressed classes in the Congress, the depressed classes themselves were not in the Congress. His opposition to Gandhi, however, resulted from a more substantial truth: his conviction that despite all his loathing of untouchability and 'the sub-human status of Harijans', Gandhi was 'still not condemnatory enough against the root cause of Varna theology'.<sup>14</sup>

Ambedkar was in his early forties when the Civil Disobedience Movement convulsed India and reverberated around the British empire. Speaking as a representative of the depressed classes, he categorically declared that his class of people were neither anxious nor clamorous for an immediate transfer of power from the British to the Indians. They had not, he added, launched any movement for effecting such a transfer, though they had their own grievances against the British people. But, he asserted, to be true to facts, the position was that they were not anxious for the transfer of power. In case however the British Government was unable to resist the forces clamouring for such a transfer of political power, then, he stated, "our submission is that if you make that transfer, that transfer will be accompanied by such conditions and by such provisions that the power shall not fall into the hands of a clique, into the hands of an oligarchy, or into the hands of a group of people, whether Muhammadans or Hindus; but that that solution shall be such that the power shall be shared by all communities in their respective proportions. Taking that view, I do not see how I, for one, can take any serious part in the deliberations of the Federal Structure Committee unless I know where I and my community stand."<sup>15</sup>

In the light of the stand taken by Mahatma Gandhi the remarks of Ambedkar are seen to be both sensible and timely, touching as they do on the attitude of the depressed classes to the question of transference of political power. Defending his position and in a language commensurate with his dignity, nobility and simplicity, Gandhi described the claims advanced on behalf of the achuts as the 'unkindest cut of all'. It was then that he declared: "I would not seal the vital interests of the Untouchables even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim

myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end of India to the other to tell the Untouchables that separate electorates and separate reservation is not the way to remove this bar-sinister, which is the shame, not of them but of orthodox Hinduism.”<sup>16</sup>

One can hear the voice of truth, of self-confidence and of non-violence in the expression ‘a referendum of the Untouchables’; in the submission to it are contained all these characteristic qualities of the high-souled leader. Nor was the remark made by him on Ambedkar himself without its significance. In the following passage, he gives further evidence of his attitude to the question of the untouchables and of preventing a division in Hinduism. Had the bitter experiences Ambedkar had undergone warped his judgement? Was not the cause of the untouchables dear to Gandhi as life itself? Was it a proper claim registered by Ambedkar when he sought to speak for everyone of the untouchables of India?

Here, then, were Gandhi’s answers:

I would fear rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived. Therefore, with all my regard for Dr. Ambedkar, and for his desire to see the Untouchables uplifted, with all my regard for his ability, I must say in all humility that here the great wrong under which he has laboured and perhaps the bitter experiences that he has undergone have for the moment warped his judgement. It hurts me to have to say this, but I would be untrue to the cause of the Untouchables, which is as dear to me as life itself, if I did not say it. I will not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility, and I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire,

being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.<sup>17</sup>

But if the untouchables were grateful to Gandhi for not bargaining away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world they owed even more to Ambedkar who had led them against the Congress for full five years in the Round Table Conference and in the Joint Parliamentary Committee. On hearing the results of the elections to the Provincial Legislatures in India, which took place in February 1937 under the Government of India Act, 1935, Ambedkar had reason to be shocked. Apart from some known agents of the Congress who always yielded to the Congress gold, the untouchables could not have thought of going over to the Congress en masse. Ambedkar could not believe that they had forgotten how Gandhi and the Congress had "opposed, inch by inch up to the very last moment, every one of their demands for political safeguards."<sup>18</sup> He was sure, therefore, that the results of the elections that took place in 1937 were part of a false propaganda and an utter perversion. The Congress, according to Ambedkar, had advertised the election results to bolster up its claim to represent the untouchables on the ground that out of 151 seats assigned to the Scheduled Castes the Independent Labour Party organized by Ambedkar had won only twelve. The rest of the seats had thus gone to the Congress. "This mess," Ambedkar maintained, "is served out from the Congress kitchen as conclusive proof to show that the Congress represents the Untouchables."<sup>19</sup> 'This absurd Congress version' had no doubt gone home in certain quarters and people had accepted it without any attempt at verification. Rejecting the Congress claim that it represented the untouchables, Ambedkar revealed that "the results of 1937 Election conclusively disprove the Congress claim to represent the Untouchables. Far from supporting the Congress version



the results of the Election show: (1) that out of 151 the Congress got only 73 seats; (2) that the Untouchables in almost every constituency fought against the Congress by putting up their own candidates; (3) that the majority of 73 seats won by the Congress were won with the help of Hindu votes and they do not therefore in any way represent the Scheduled Castes; and (4) that of 151 seats those won by the Congress in the real sense i.e., with the majority of votes of the Scheduled Castes, were only 38. As to the Independent Labour Party it was started in 1937 just a few months before the elections. It functioned only in the Province of Bombay. There was no time to organize branches in other Provinces.”<sup>20</sup>

The wicked lie propagated by the Congress filled Ambedkar with a surge of indignation; it sickened him, for he knew that the Independent Labour Party far from being a failure had captured a good number of seats in the Province of Bombay where only it had set up candidates. Of the fifteen seats allotted to the Scheduled Caste in Bombay Presidency, the Independent Labour Party had bagged thirteen. To it had gone the due meed of credit for winning two general seats. Ambedkar was buoyed up by the success of his party and by the fact that he had completed the work which proved beyond doubt that the story of the Congress capturing all the seats reserved for the Scheduled Caste was but a wicked canard.

In *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: *Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 9) Ambedkar offers his own intensely personal view of the Congress and of Mahatma Gandhi. The slowness of the depressed classes' liberation movement is blamed on the Congress and on Gandhi. He emphatically states here, contrary to the popular belief, that no community trusts Gandhi 'although he has been saying that he is the friend of the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes'. In answer to the question what is the reason for this distrust he sees all around Gandhi, Ambedkar says, "In my judgement, there cannot be a greater tragedy for a leader to be distrusted by everybody as Mr. Gandhi is today. I am however certain that this is not how the Hindus will react. As usual, they will denounce the book and call me names. But as the proverb says: 'The caravan must pass on, though the dogs

bark'. In the same way, I must do my duty, no matter what my adversaries may have to say. For as Voltaire observed: Who writes the history of his own time must expect to be attacked for everything he has said, and for everything he has not said: but these little drawbacks should not discourage a man who loves truth and liberty, expects nothing, fears nothing, asks nothing and limits his ambition to the cultivation of letters."<sup>21</sup>

In the course of his demonstration that the Congress and Gandhi had done pretty little for the untouchables, Ambedkar repeatedly insists that the Congress has seldom entertained any question of social reform no matter how urgent. This is the reason, he writes, why no Congress President after 1895 has referred to the question of social reform in his presidential address. The Congress by its action in 1895 had, according to him, become a purely political party with little or no interest at all in the removal or mitigation of social evils. In 1917, however, in its annual session held at Calcutta under the presidentship of Mrs. Annie Besant the following resolution was passed:

This Congress urges upon the people of India the necessity, justice and righteousness of removing all disabilities imposed by custom upon the Depressed Classes, the disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience.<sup>22</sup>

This was for Ambedkar a strange event, for the Congress had never done such a thing before, although it had functioned for thirty-two years. It was, he says, even in contravention of its declared policy. Explaining why the Congress thought it necessary to pass such a resolution in 1917, he refers to the resolutions passed by the depressed classes in 1917 at two separate meetings held in Bombay. In the first of these meetings held on November 11, 1917, a resolution carried unanimously prayed "the British Government to be so gracious as to protect those interests by granting to those classes the right to elect their own representatives to the said Councils in proportion to their numbers." The fifth and sixth resolutions were no less important. The fifth resolution authorized the Chairman of that public meeting "*to request the Indian National Congress to pass at its forthcoming*

*session a distinct and independent resolution declaring to the people of India at large the necessity, justice, and righteousness of removing all the disabilities imposed by religion and custom upon the Depressed Classes*, those disabilities being of a most vexatious and oppressive character, subjecting those classes to considerable hardship and inconvenience by prohibiting them from admission into public schools, hospitals, courts of justice and public offices, and the use of public wells, etc. These disabilities social in origin, amount in law and practice to political disabilities and as such fall legitimately within the political mission and propaganda of the Indian National Congress."

The sixth resolution was a prayer to all caste Hindus, who claimed political rights, "to take steps for the purpose of removing the blot of degradation from the Depressed Classes, which has subjected those classes to the worst of treatment in their own country."

At the second meeting, also held in November 1917, a number of resolutions were passed, three of which are noteworthy:

(3) "That it is the sense of this meeting that the administration of India should be largely under the control of the British till all classes of and specially the Depressed Classes, rise up to a condition to effectually participate in the administration of the country."

(4) "That if the British Government have decided to give political concession to the Indian Public, this meeting prays that Government should grant the Untouchables their own representatives in the various legislative bodies to ensure to them their civil and political rights."

(6) "That this meeting prays that Government looking to the special needs of the Depressed Classes, should make primary education both free and compulsory. That the meeting also requests the Government to give special facilities by way of scholarships to the students of the Depressed Classes."

Ambedkar perceived with great clarity the connection between the resolutions passed by the depressed classes and the Congress resolution of 1917. Irrespective of the merits of the reason cited for the Congress resolution, Ambedkar's historical sense, his ordering of facts and systematic presentation of data are worthy of note. This is also evident from the details that follow. To

reveal the inter-connection between the Congress and the depressed-classes resolutions he adverts to the political events of 1917 and recalls that on August 20 that year the then Secretary of State for India, the late Mr. Montague, had announced in the House of Commons the new policy of the British Government towards India. It was 'the policy of gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'. Expectantly awaiting such a declaration of policy, leading Indian politicians were making ready their schemes for changes in the constitutional structure of the country. It was in anticipation of such a policy that the Scheme of the Nineteen and the Congress-League Scheme were formulated. Of the many such schemes, these two had aroused considerable public interest. As regards their nomenclature, it may be pointed out that the first was formulated by the nineteen elected additional members of the Imperial Legislature Council while the second was a joint scheme of political reforms supported by both the Congress and the League and also known as the Lucknow Pact. The schemes had come into being in 1916, a year preceding the announcement of the new policy of His Majesty's Government.

Interested in getting its own scheme accepted by His Majesty's Government, the Congress was keen on securing the support of all communities in India. Because the Muslim League had already accepted the scheme, the backing of the depressed classes was imperative. Though not as solidly organized as the Muslims, they were no less politically conscious as was evident from their Resolutions. What was really disturbing was their anti-Congress stance. Citing an instance of their antipathy to the Congress, Ambedkar refers to the depressed classes' reaction to the threat given in 1895 by Tilak's followers to burn the Congress pandal if its use was allowed to the Social Conference for ventilating social wrongs. The untouchables had organized on that occasion a demonstration against the Congress and actually burned its effigy. This opposition to the Congress had continued ever since. "The resolutions passed by both the meetings of the Depressed Classes held in Bombay in 1917," Ambedkar declares, "give ample testimony to the existence of this antipathy in the minds

of the Depressed Classes towards the Congress. The Congress while anxious to get the support of the Depressed Classes to the Congress-League scheme of Reforms knew very well that it had no chance of getting it. As the Congress did not then practise—it had not learned it then—the art of corrupting people as it does now, it enlisted the services of the late Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, an Ex-President of the Congress. As the President of the Depressed Classes Mission Society he exercised considerable influence over the Depressed Classes. It was as a result of his influence and out of respect for him that a section of the Depressed Classes agreed to give support to the Congress-League Scheme.”<sup>23</sup>

Ambedkar perceived with his usual clarity that the text of the resolution did not lend unconditional support to the Congress-League Scheme. Whatever support it gave was conditional. It depended on the Congress passing a resolution to the effect that it would remove the social disabilities of the untouchables. It was thus apparent that the Congress resolution was meant to fulfil its part of the contract with the depressed classes which was effected through Sir Narayan Chandavarkar.

The explanation provided by Ambedkar for the genesis of the Congress Resolution of 1917 sounds convincing and proves, as he says, that there was an ulterior motive behind it, a motive that was not at all spiritual. Ambedkar had no doubt in his mind that it was a political motive, for had it not been so, the Congress would certainly have given effect to the demand contained in it.<sup>24</sup> Had the Congress been earnest about and honest to its resolution of 1917, it would have organized a drive against untouchability and given effect to the sentiments expressed in its contact with the depressed classes. Shocked and chagrined, Ambedkar says, “The Congress did nothing. The passing of the Resolution was a heartless transaction. It was a formal fulfilment of a condition which the Depressed Classes had made for giving their support to the Congress-League scheme. Congressmen did not appear to be charged with any qualms of conscience or with any sense of righteous indignation against man’s inhumanity to man which is what untouchability is. They forgot the Resolution the very day on which it was passed. The Resolution was a dead letter. Nothing came out of it.”<sup>25</sup>

Critics may comment that this is the language of a duellist who has abandoned his poise and picked up a club. But the words used by Ambedkar flow from his sense of humiliation and annoyance. The Congress had betrayed the poor, hapless dalits. 'A Shabby Show' had begun with the Congress abandoning its plan. It was two years later<sup>26</sup> that Gandhi entered Indian politics and very soon captured the Congress and overhauled it completely, changing it out of recognition. Led by him, the Congress became a mass organization by enrolling all and sundry as its members. The change was phenomenal. Ambedkar describes it in the following words:

It forged sanctions behind its resolutions by adopting the policy of non-co-operation and civil disobedience. It made it a policy to stage demonstration of non-co-operation and civil disobedience and to court gaol. It launched a country-wide organization and propaganda in favour of the Congress. It put out what is called a Constructive Programme of social amelioration. To finance these activities it started a fund of one crore of rupees. It was called the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Thus by 1922, the Congress was completely transformed by Mr. Gandhi. The new Congress was entirely different from the old, except in name.<sup>27</sup>

The programme of social amelioration was obviously chalked out and made an important feature of the Congress. The Working Committee at its meeting in Bardoli held in February 1922 outlined it and passed a number of resolutions. It advised all Congress organizations to be engaged, among others, in organizing the depressed classes for a better life, in improving their social, mental and moral conditions, in inducing them to send their children to national schools and in providing for them the ordinary facilities which the other citizens enjoyed. On 20 February 1922 the resolution was confirmed by the All-India Congress Committee. After the confirmation of the Bardoli resolution, the matter was transferred to the Working Committee for action. In June 1922 the matter was taken up by the Working Committee at its meeting held in Lucknow and a resolution was passed, appointing a Committee consisting of four mem-

bers to formulate a scheme embodying practical measures to be adopted for bettering the condition of the untouchables throughout the country. In spite of all these resolutions, nothing was done to translate the scheme into action for ameliorating the condition of the untouchables. Ambedkar cites two more resolutions concerning the question of the condition of the achuts and concludes by saying: "Here ends the second stage in the history of the resolution remitting the question of the Untouchables to a special Committee." The third stage in its history, he remarks, is marked by another resolution which the Working Committee passed in May 1923.

He goes on to expose the futility of the measures taken by the Congress and the emptiness of its resolution. "Thus," he says in a tone reminiscent of Hardy's at the end of the story of Tess, "is told the sad tale of the resolution and how it began and how it ended. What shameful close to a flaring start!" What embittered Ambedkar was the fact that Gandhi had captured the Congress and was its focal personality, a driving politician.

In *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* the epigraph from Thucydides sets the tone of his criticism of this ever-growing organization. "It may be your interest to be our masters," wrote the Greek historian, "but how can it be ours to be your slaves?" Substitute Ambedkar for Thucydides, and you have in this interrogation the substance and meaning of all Ambedkar's speeches and writings. A questioning slave is a rebel, not a drudge; his spirit has already broken loose and shattered the fetters of drudgery. It is in the spirit of one who has already shaken off one's slavery and lives in complete freedom, abhorring intolerance and hatred, that Ambedkar deals with the Congress.<sup>28</sup>

It may be pointed out here that before the resolution appointing the Committee was adopted by the Working Committee in June 1922, one of its members, Swami Shradhanand, tendered his resignation. He was the greatest champion of the untouchables on the Committee. Had he continued to work on it he would certainly have produced a salutary result or, as Ambedkar puts it, produced a very big scheme. The Congress, afraid that he would make big demand on the Congress funds for the implementation of the programmes relating to the untouchables,

the Congress did not want him in the Committee. Nor was it in favour of the abolition of untouchability. This is amply borne out by the support it lent to the policy of separate schools and separate wells and by its adding insult to injury when it relegated the problem to the Hindu Mahasabha. There could not have been an organization, according to Ambedkar, more unsuited to work for the uplift of the untouchables than the Mahasabha. Enlarging upon his pejorative view of this body, he says, "If there is any body which is quite unfit for addressing itself to the problem of the Untouchables, it is the Hindu Mahasabha. It is a militant Hindu organization. Its aim and object is to conserve in every way everything that is Hindu, religious and cultural. It is not a social reform association. It is a purely political organization, whose main object and aim are to combat the influence of the Muslims in Indian politics. Just to preserve its political strength, it wants to maintain its social solidarity, and its way to maintain social solidarity is not to talk about caste or untouchability. How could such a body have been selected by the Congress for carrying on the work of the Untouchables passes my comprehension."<sup>29</sup> From this Ambedkar concludes that the Congress was not interested in the welfare of the untouchables, it 'wanted somehow to get rid of an inconvenient problem and wash its hands of it'.

Now Ambedkar addresses himself to another question: Did the Congress abandon the programme because it had no funds? "Quite the contrary," he declares and musters enough evidence—receipts and grants—in tabular form to show that the distribution of the sums received by the Congress was not made on the basis of any rational principle. In a tone sizzling with righteous indignation he comments upon the tragic tale of 'a reckless plunder' and of 'frenzied finance of extravagance and waste': "It is not known whether these huge sums kept at the disposal of the named payees were accounted for or who received the formidable amounts made payable to the nameless payees. Even if there were satisfactory answers to these questions there can be no doubt that a worse case of frenzied finance of extravagance and waste, it would be very difficult to find. It is a sad episode marked by a reckless plunder committed by the preda-



tory leaders of the Congress of public money for nursing their own constituencies without any qualms of conscience.

"It is unnecessary to pursue the story of the organized and systematic loot by Congressmen of the balance of 1 crore and 30 lakhs which was spent in subsequent years. It is enough to say that never was there such an organized loot of public money. The point of immediate interest however is that the scrutiny of this list of grants does not show the amelioration of the Untouchables, which has been one of the purposes for which money has been advanced from the Swaraj Fund."<sup>30</sup>

Ambedkar sums up his observations on the 'shabby show' by bringing to light the insincerity of the Congress which could find only Rs. 43,381 out of Rs. 49½ lakhs the party spent for executing the Bardoli Programme in which the uplift of the untouchables occupied a prominent place. The relegation of the Bardoli resolution somewhere down on the priority list was, to him, an evidence of fraud insofar as the untouchables were concerned. It appeared as if the desire of the Congress to undertake the uplift of the marginalised menials had disappeared. Where was the love for the untouchables, Ambedkar asks, which the Congress professed? Where was Gandhi when this flagrant fraud was being committed? Ambedkar's main indictment, however, is formulated in the sentence "The fact is that Mr. Gandhi, besides giving utterance to pious platitude, did not take the slightest interest in the programme of amelioration." It was not difficult for Ambedkar to realize that if Gandhi was so minded he could have taken pre-emptive measure and stopped the organized loot from the Tilak Swaraj Fund that was being carried on by Congressmen. The amount saved could have been reserved for the benefit of the untouchables. What Ambedkar finds painful and of what he strongly disapproves is contained in the following two sentences: "Strange as it may appear, he sat silent and unconcerned. Instead of feeling any remorse, Mr. Gandhi justified his indifference to the cause of the Untouchables by arguments so strange that no one would believe them."<sup>31</sup>

None but Ambedkar could thus indict Mahatma Gandhi, who had already become known as a living symbol of struggle against untouchability, and his political activities were

becoming increasingly known with the masses seeing in him the leader of the revolutionary, freedom movement. Of special significance is Ambedkar's summary dismissal of Gandhi as a liar and illusion-monger: "The regrettable part of this tragedy is the realization of the fact how Mr. Gandhi has learned to find unction in illusions. Whether Mr. Gandhi likes to live in a world of illusions may be a matter of doubt. But there is no doubt he likes to create illusions in order to use them as arguments to support his cherished proposition. The reason he has given for not taking personal responsibility for the uplift of the Untouchables furnishes the best evidence of this habit of Mr. Gandhi. To tell the Untouchables that they must not act against the Hindus, because they will be acting against their kith and kin, may be understood. But to assume that the Hindus regard the Untouchables as their kith and kin is to set up an illusion. To ask the Hindus to undertake the removal of untouchability is good advice. But to go to the length of assuring oneself that the Hindus are so overwhelmed with a sense of shame for the inhuman treatment they have accorded to the Untouchables that they dare not fail to abolish untouchability and that there is a band of Hindu Reformers pledged to do nothing but remove untouchability is to conjure an illusion to fool the Untouchables and to fool the world at large. It may be sound logic to argue that what benefits the whole also benefits the part and that one need not confine himself to looking after the part. But to assume that a piece, as separate as the Untouchables, is a part of the Hindu whole is to deceive oneself. Few know what tragedies the Untouchables as well as the country have had to go through on account of the illusions of Mr. Gandhi."<sup>32</sup>

If Ambedkar, a realist and sceptic, saw in Gandhi an illusionist out to fool the untouchables and to fool the world at large, it was not because he was highly alarmed at the popularity which the Mahatma enjoyed. His purpose was obvious—to be able to invigorate the democratic sentiments that were on the march in the country. How could he have accelerated the process of emancipating the downtrodden otherwise than by indicting those who were retarding it? And now, when the country was waging a revolutionary battle to liberate itself, how could the have-nots be denied their rights to freedom and equality? Ambedkar,

himself an insulated achut, felt the pinch of social slavery to a greater degree than Gandhi did. His first-hand experience of being a mahar untouchable had turned him into a seething rebel against the Establishment, against all status quoists and against the oppression of the caste Hindus who had forced their marginalised compatriots to lead the miserable life of a ruined people, worse than that of animals, undergoing all manner of hardships and privations and dripping with sweat and blood. He had also seen how, no longer able to endure the tyranny of the privileged castes, large numbers of his fellow achuts were compelled to leave their beloved home villages and wander about in quest of a livelihood. Even in towns and cities, all alone, segregated and deemed unapproachable, they were subjected to every form of humiliation and contempt and were being trampled underfoot and spat on everywhere they went.

In other places, too, the ardent commitment to the cause of the depressed classes is displayed fully, especially in the safeguards formulated by him and submitted to the Indian Round Table Conference for the protection of the depressed classes. Among the terms and conditions on which these classes were to consent to place themselves under a majority rule in a self-governing India were the demand for equal citizenship and for the free enjoyment of equal rights. His purpose in drafting and formulating the safeguards was to secure the abolition of untouchability and to create the equality of citizenship. Under the head 'Fundamental Right' the text of the memorandum said: "All subjects of the State in India are equal before the law and possess equal civic rights. Any existing enactment, regulation, order, custom or interpretation of law by which any penalty, disadvantage, disability is imposed upon or any discrimination is made against any subject of the State on account of untouchability shall, as from the day on which this Constitution comes into operation, cease to have any effect in India."<sup>33</sup> And here apparently Ambedkar was advocating the exercise of equal rights of citizenship by the depressed classes. If, he added, these declarations of rights were not to be mere pious pronouncements then they should be protected from interference by adequate pains and penalties. His fear was that the depressed classes would face difficulties in exercising their rights to all public utilities. The

first difficulty, he pointed out, was the fear of open violence against them by the great majority of the orthodox classes who protected their interests and dignity from any supposed onslaught by the depressed classes. Moreover, the second difficulty arose from the economic position in which the depressed classes found themselves. They had no economic independence, for while some cultivated lands of the orthodox classes as their tenants, others lived on their earnings as farm labourers. The rest, Ambedkar said in his memorandum, subsisted on the food or grain given to them by the orthodox masters in lieu of service rendered to them as village servants. There were instances of the orthodox classes using their economic power as a weapon against the depressed classes when the latter had dared to exercise their rights.

What the memorandum said about the injustices to which the orthodox classes subjected the dalits when the latter dared to defy the orthodox masters makes sad reading, although it is a repetition of the age-old tale of dalits' suffering. When such a defiance was shown by any tenant, he was at once evicted from the land of his master, who stopped his employment and discontinued his remuneration. "...This boycott is often planned on such an extensive scale as to include the prevention of the Depressed Classes from using the commonly used paths and the stoppage of sale of the necessaries of life by the village Bania. According to the evidence sometimes small causes suffice for the proclamation of a social boycott against the Depressed Classes. Frequently it follows on the exercise by the Depressed Classes of their right to the use of the common-well, but cases have been by no means rare where a stringent boycott has been proclaimed simply because a Depressed Class man has put on the sacred thread, has bought a piece of land, has put on good clothes or ornaments, or has carried a marriage procession with the bridegroom on the horse through the public street.

"We do not know of any weapon more effective than this social boycott which could have been invented for the suppression of the Depressed Classes. The method of open violence pales away before it, for it has the most far reaching and deadening effects. It is the more dangerous because it passes as a lawful method consistent with the theory of freedom of contact. We agree that this tyranny of the majority must be put down with a

firm hand, if we are to guarantee the Depressed Classes the freedom of speech and action necessary for their uplift.”<sup>34</sup>

The memorandum also sought many other provisions to be made in the Constitution of India for the education, sanitation, recruitment in public services and other matters of social and political advancement of the depressed classes. Emphasizing the need for special departmental care, the seventh condition was strongly worded and concluded with a down-to-earth catalogue of the forms of tyranny and oppression practised against the depressed people. Of central importance, it sheds light not only on the objectives that Ambedkar was trying to achieve but also on the nature of the struggle he was so tirelessly waging:

### *Condition No. VII*

#### **SPECIAL DEPARTMENTAL CARE**

The helpless, hapless and sapless condition of the Depressed Classes must be entirely attributed to the dogged and determined opposition of the whole mass of the orthodox population which will not allow the Depressed Classes to have equality of status or equality of treatment. It is not enough to say of their economic condition that they are poverty-stricken or that they are a class of landless labourers, although both these statements are statements of fact. It has to be noted that the poverty of the Depressed Classes is due largely to the social prejudices in consequence of which many an occupation for earning a living is closed to them. This is a fact which differentiates the position of the Depressed Classes from that of the ordinary caste labourer and is often a source of trouble between the two. It has also to be borne in mind that the forms of tyranny and oppression practised against the Depressed Classes are very various and the capacity of the Depressed Classes to protect themselves is extremely limited....<sup>35</sup>

Having laid down this condition, Ambedkar enumerates the forms of oppression to which the depressed classes were subjected. To punish the disobedience of the erring pariahs their

masters brought false cases in the village court or in the criminal courts; obtained, on application, from Government waste lands lying all round the paracheri, so as to impound the pariahs' cattle or obstruct the way to their temple; had mirasi names fraudulently entered in the Government account against the paracheri; pulled down the huts and destroyed the growth in the backyards; denied occupancy right in immemorial sub-tenancies, forcibly cut the pariahs' crops, and on being resisted, charged them with theft and rioting; under misrepresentations, got them to execute documents by which they were afterwards ruined; cut off the flow of water from their fields, and without legal notice, had the property of sub-tenants attached for the landlords' arrear of revenue.

Ambedkar's participation in the deliberations of the various sessions of the Round Table Conference is delightful reading and of enormous historical importance. To every session of the Round Table Conference he made some positive contribution unlike Mahatma Gandhi, whose choice to represent the Congress at the conference was, in Ambedkar's view, unfortunate, for a worse representative could not have been chosen to guide India's destiny. Continuing his attack on Gandhi, whom he deemed a failure as a unifying force, Ambedkar indicts him in the following words:

Mr. Gandhi presents himself as a man full of humility. But his behaviour at the Round Table Conference showed that in the flush of victory Mr. Gandhi can be very petty-minded. As a result of his successful compromise with the Government just before he came, Mr. Gandhi treated the whole Non-Congress delegation with contempt. He insulted them whenever an occasion furnished him with an excuse by openly telling them that they were nobodies and that he alone, as the delegate of the Congress, represented the country. Instead of unifying the Indian delegation, Mr. Gandhi widened the breach. From the point of view of knowledge, Mr. Gandhi proved himself to be a very ill-equipped person.<sup>36</sup>

To Gandhi's admirers so individualistic a view may not carry any conviction, but one can well see that it springs out of the

author's own personal experience at the Round Table Conference, the problem posed for him by Gandhi. Ambedkar realized, for one thing, that Gandhi was no more than counterfeit copper, not pure and fine gold; he was a man of platitudes bereft completely of constructive views or suggestions. Ambedkar saw in him a curious complex of a man who threatened to resist any compromise on what he regarded as principle though others regarded it as pure prejudice.

As a historical document *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* cannot be ignored by any writer of India's modern social history, especially of the Congress vis-à-vis Ambedkar or the depressed classes. The dispute between Gandhi and Ambedkar would occupy the central place in such a history and would provide incontrovertible reasons for Ambedkar's ire. With remarkable finesse and the skill of a psycho-analyst Ambedkar records Gandhi's reactions and impressions, the play of anger or frustration and hope and joy reflected in his face. When the Minorities Pact was produced, incorporating the recognition given to the untouchables as a separate political entity, Gandhi's reactions are represented vividly and effectively. "Mr. Gandhi," Ambedkar remarks, "was furious. He attacked everybody who had taken part in producing the Minorities Pact...Whenever they asked for an explanation, Mr. Gandhi did nothing except to get angry. Mr. Gandhi himself could not give a logical and consistent defence of his opposition to the Untouchables."

But Gandhi had his own reasons for opposing the demand for separate electorates for the depressed classes. His opposition to Ambedkar was purely political; personally he paid him some glowing tributes even while expressing his disapproval of his role as a representative of the untouchables at the Round Table Conference. Addressing himself to the question: Does Dr. Ambedkar, their representative, insist on separate electorates for them? Gandhi asserted: "I have the highest regard for Dr. Ambedkar. He has every right to be bitter. That he does not break our heads is an act of self-restraint on his part. He is today so much saturated with suspicion that he cannot see anything else. He sees in every Hindu a determined opponent of the 'Untouchables' and it is quite natural. The same thing

happened to me in my early days in South Africa, where I was hounded out by Europeans wherever I went. It is quite natural for him to vent his wrath. But the separate electorates that he seeks will not give him social reform. He may himself mount to power and position but nothing good will accrue to the 'Untouchables'. I can say all this with authority, having lived with the 'Untouchables' and having shared their joys and sorrows all these years."<sup>37</sup>

If Gandhi found fault with Ambedkar's fight for separate electorates for the depressed classes, Ambedkar saw but absurdity in Gandhi's stubborn opposition to this demand. There was no meeting-point between the two. This is evident also from Ambedkar's reaction to Gandhi's 'fast unto death' which commenced on September 20, 1932 as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the untouchables. "The story of this fact (sic)," Ambedkar comments, "has been told by Mr. Pyarelal in a volume which bears the picturesque and flamboyant title of 'The Epic Fast'. The curious may refer it. I must, however, warn him that it is written by a Boswell and has all the faults of a Boswelliana."<sup>38</sup> This is yet another manifestation of Ambedkar's embittered attitude to Gandhi's political activities which, according to him, were directed more towards damaging the cause of the untouchables than towards furthering their interests. Referring to the elections of 1937, he shows how the Congress had dealt a great blow to the untouchables and deprived them of any share in the executive. He then follows this reference by the reminder that the untouchables suffered more due to the hostility of the administration than due to bad laws. To deprive them of their share in the executive was to perpetuate their woes. Ambedkar had noticed with shock and indignation that the administration was under the control of the caste Hindus who carried into it their inherent prejudices against the achuts. The latter, he maintained, accounting for his demand for a reasonable share in the executive, "can never hope to get protection from the police, justice from the judiciary or the benefit of a statutory law from the administration, so long as the Public Services continued to be manned by the Hindus. The only hope of making the Public Services less malevolent and more



responsible to the needs of the Untouchables is to have members of the Untouchables in the higher Executive.”<sup>39</sup>

Having endeavoured to expose Gandhi’s attitude to the untouchables, Ambedkar proceeds to treat of the Indian caste system and of the reasons why untouchability will not soon vanish. To him untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated economic exploitation, but it is also, he declares, a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation. At the same time it is an attitude of the Hindu who will never give up the economic and social advantages which it gives. And, maintaining that for untouchability to go, it is the Hindu who must change, he also recalls the fact that history “will not justify the conclusion that a Hindu has a quick conscience or if he has it is so active as to charge him with moral indignation and drive him to undertake a crusade to eradicate the wrong. History shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict victory is always with economics. Vested interests have never been known to have willingly divested themselves unless there was sufficient force to compel them. The Untouchables cannot hope to generate any compelling force. They are poor and they are scattered. They can be easily suppressed should they raise their head.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus most of the blame for the persistence of the evils of caste system is laid on Hinduism. Almost throughout his writings Ambedkar uses *brāhmanism* and *Hinduism* as synonymous terms and holds both responsible for every social evil. The traditions and social philosophy of *brāhmanism*, he observes, are the most avowed enemies of the servile classes—the *sūdras* and the untouchables—who constitute about 80 per cent of the total Hindu population. He recognizes that if the trampled weak in India are so degraded, devoid of hope and ambition, it is entirely due to the *brāhmanic* traditions and philosophy. As for the principles of the philosophy of *brāhmanism*, they are said to be six: 1. graded inequality between the different classes; 2. complete disarmament of the Shudras and the Untouchables; 3. complete prohibition of the education of Shudras and the Untouchables; 4. ban on the Shudras and the Untouchables occupying places of power and authority; 5. ban on the Shudras and the Untouchables acquiring property; 6. complete subjugation and suppression of women.<sup>41</sup> Ambedkar is of the view that

these are 'cardinal' principles of the philosophy of brāhmaṇism. Partial and lopsided as is this view of Hinduism, it is nevertheless of interest, owing to the light it sheds on the attitude of the social underdogs towards Hinduism, while it also embodies considerable truth. Not without its significance is also Ambedkar's repeated emphasis on the first of these principles, i.e., inequality which, according to him, is the official doctrine of brāhmaṇism. Most interesting of all, however, is the illustration of this inequality. Ambedkar does not fail to notice or to point out the suppression of the labouring classes aspiring to equality. Such a suppression, he holds, has been carried out by the brāhmaṇs without remorse as their bounden duty. He recognizes that

There are countries where education did not spread beyond a few. But India is the only country where the intellectual class, namely, Brahmins not only made education their monopoly but declared acquisition of education by the lower classes, a crime punishable by cutting off of the tongue or by the pouring of molten lead in the ear of the offender. The Congress politicians complain that the British are ruling India by a wholesale disarmament of the people of India. But they forget that disarmament of the Shudras and the Untouchables was the rule of law promulgated by the Brahmins.<sup>42</sup>

Then, too, besides dwelling on the brāhmaṇs' belief in the disarmament of the śūdras and the untouchables, he proceeds to point out the injustice brāhmaṇism has done to women. Its inhumanity, he explains, has not remained confined to men; it has encompassed women as well. With more mockery and scoffery in his voice than becomes a humanist like him, he dismisses all Hinduism as something incorrigibly stupid and inhuman. The brāhmaṇ, according to him, is responsible for the worst that women have suffered from in any part of the world. "Widow," he explains by way of illustration, "were not allowed to remarry. The Brahmin upheld the doctrine. Girls were required to be married before 8 and the husband had the right to consummate the marriage at any time thereafter, whether she had reached

puberty or not did not matter. The Brahmin gave the doctrine his strongest support. The record of the Brahmins as law givers for the Shudras, for the Untouchables and for women is the blackest as compared with the record of the intellectual classes in other parts of the world. For no intellectual class has prostituted its intelligence to invent a philosophy to keep his uneducated countrymen in a perpetual state of ignorance and poverty as the Brahmins have done in India. Every Brahmin today believes in this philosophy of Brahmanism propounded by his forefathers. He is an alien element in the Hindu society. The Brahmin vis-a-vis Shudras and the Untouchables [is] as foreign as the German is to the French, as the Jew is to the Gentile or as the White is to the Negro."<sup>43</sup>

Having thus submitted his conception of Brāhmanism, Ambedkar then returns to many other topics, among which is 'The Doom of the Untouchables' under the general title of *Gandhism* (Chap. XI). In the first place, he explains, Gandhism, when defined as "return to the village and making the village self-sufficient," becomes a mere matter of regionalism. Such a conception, he points out, is purely imaginary, for regionalism is a small insignificant part of Gandhism which, he adds, has a social as well as an economic philosophy. Ambedkar, it is worth noting, deals first with Gandhi's teachings on India's social problems and, considering that the caste system constitutes the main social problem here, provides and reproduces Gandhi's views on it as they were 'fully elaborated in 1921-22 in a Gujarati journal called *Nava-Jivan*. Of these, what Gandhi says about the caste system is not only illuminating but also one which incidentally throws light on the reason why Ambedkar is critical of him. Gandhi is said to have believed that 'if Hindu Society has been able to stand, it is because it is founded on the caste system'. The seeds of independence, Gandhi had added, are to be found in the caste system, the creation of which is evidence enough to prove that the community which created it possessed unique power of organization.<sup>44</sup> From this and many other convictions appearing in *Nava-Jivan*, one can easily conclude that Gandhi in 1922 was a pronounced defender of casteism.

Then, after recalling Gandhi's later rejection of the caste system in favour of the varna system, Ambedkar devotes special

attention to the Gandhian analysis of economic ills, commenting first on its primitivism and then on its opposition to democracy. He has little doubt that there is nothing new in Gandhi's arguments that machinery and modern civilization help to concentrate management and control into relatively few hands, or that machinery and modern civilization cause deaths, maimings andcripplings far in excess of the corresponding injuries by war, etc. Such pleas are, according to Ambedkar, old, repetitive, and traceable to Rousseau, Ruskin, Tolstoy and their school. Moreover, Gandhism, a primitive cult, advocates what may be deemed a return to nature, to animal life. As such simple ideas do not die, there is always some simpleton to profess and preach them. The practical man, however, has always found them unfruitful and has in his pragmatism and search of progress thought it best to reject. Describing the Gandhian economics as 'hopelessly fallacious', Ambedkar comes down heavily upon it and begins with the admission that machinery and modern civilization have indeed produced many evils. That these evils are no argument against them is because the evils are not due to machinery and modern civilization. In Ambedkar's view, they are born of wrong social organization. It is due to such an organization that private property and pursuit of personal gain have been made matters of absolute sanctity. "If machinery and civilization have not benefited everybody," Ambedkar states, "the remedy is not to condemn machinery and civilization but to alter the organization of society so that the benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue to all."<sup>45</sup>

Ambedkar never tires of uttering censures against any person who does not destroy, or help to destroy, the caste system. Having shown that in Gandhism the common man has no hope, for it treats man as an animal and no more, and that the aim of human society must be to enable every person to lead a life of culture, Ambedkar goes on to emphasize that a life of culture is possible only when there is sufficient leisure. To provide sufficient leisure and to lessen the toil required for producing goods necessary to satisfy human needs, machines must take the place of man. Ambedkar, therefore, clinches the argument with his emphatic statement that machinery and modern civilization are inalienably inter-dependent and indispensable for emancipating

man from leading the life of an uncivilized brute. In the rest of his indictment of Gandhism, what is worthy of note is that for Ambedkar Gandhism is suited only to a society which does not accept democracy as its ideal. In an undemocratic set up, while a life of toil and drudgery is reserved for the labouring and trampled classes, the banquet of life, leisure and culture is reserved for the higher castes. This being an incontrovertible truth, one can therefore conclude that "the slogan of a democratic society must be machinery, and more machinery, civilization and more civilization. Under Gandhism the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to nature means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of the people."<sup>46</sup>

There are other and more serious charges against Gandhism, charges advanced notably to show its insistence upon class structure, which call for greater consideration. Ambedkar does not fail to mount a sustained attack on any person, however great, for his casteist leanings. One of the main charges levelled against Gandhism is that it regards the class structure of society as sacrosanct with the consequent distinctions of the rich and the poor, the high and the low. Though efforts have been made to dismiss the charge, yet the fact remains that the social consequences of such distinctions are, in Ambedkar's opinion, extremely pernicious, for they set in motion influences which are harmful to both the classes.

Obviously if Ambedkar is right in his observations on Gandhi's social thoughts, there is nothing praiseworthy about Gandhism, and in fact the only honest thing to do would be to reject it. There are already many learned Hindus and social thinkers who have conceded the arguments of Ambedkar, and in their opinion a true democrat and humanist must work with missionary zeal and concentrate on eradicating the evil of inequality and the hated system of castes. If even-handed love is basic to all religions, how is it that brāhmanic Hinduism has subjected the panchamas to the most detestable forms of social injustice and slavery? Ambedkar knew that all blanket statements about dogma or political cult are valueless and usually mischievously misleading. He, therefore, supported every state-

ment, whether about Gandhism or about the caste-charged Hinduism, by providing illustrative examples based on observation, comparison and analysis. His writings appear to exhort all readers to arise and see in him a symbol of revolt and an embodiment of affection and kindness for the hapless dalits.

There is hardly any need now to go further in our analysis of Ambedkar's prodigious work. All one can say is that the dark regions of the dalit world are illumined for the first time and embellished by the brightness of the hope he brings to them and by the blaze of his erudition. He asks the slaving communities to rise for the triumph of their cause, and, through their crusading spirit subdue the hearts of the so-called savarnas. The time has come, Ambedkar declares, when every so-called panchama must show forth that which will ensure the liberty and equality of the social outcaste and the downtrodden. Gird up the loins of thine endeavour, he calls out, that perchance thou mayest release the captive slave, the untouchable, from his chains, and enable him to attain unto true liberty.

## NOTES

1. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, pp. 529-30.
2. *Ibid*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 532
4. Vide *W.S.*, Vol. 2, pp. 557 *et seq.*
5. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, p. 562.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid*, p. 563.
8. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, *Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Future*, p. 34.
9. *Ibid.*
10. "Before a Gandhii," says Justice Iyer, "even a Nehru yielded, but Dr. Ambedkar, with a cause too dear to surrender and a conscience too clear to barter, dissented, revolted and resisted without inhibitions. Few, if any, rose to revolt against the respectable nationalists or dared to expose the reformist Hindu hypocrites as Ambedkar did to annihilate the inhumanity and injustice of the caste system..." *op. cit.*
11. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, p. 661.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. As a result of such a theology and its adoption by the savarnas "the peculiar social pollution syndrome cuts deeper than poverty does and humiliates the members with *mlecha* indignity, occupational baseness,

religious unapproachability and what not. Social privations, searing the soul of our culture, must be identified by differential diagnosis and cured by appropriate therapeutics. A poor *savarna* is socially more comfortable than a rich *avarna*. True, of course, quite often the proletariat takes in both the poor simpliciter and the Scheduled Caste indigent. If our goal is establishment of an egalitarian polity in all its facets, we must go beyond economic dialectics. Dr. Ambedkar vividly saw this point and turned his fire power on the Caste factor which vivisected Hindu, why Indian, society," V.R.K. Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

15. *S.W.*, Vol. 2, p. 662.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 662-63.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
18. Preface to Vol. 9, *W.S.*, p. ii.
19. *Ibid.*, p. iii.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. v.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
24. The resolution had called upon the higher castes having political rights to take steps to remove the blot of degradation which had subjected the depressed classes to the worst of treatment in their own country.
25. *W.S.*, Vol. 9, p. 18.
26. In 1919.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
28. The contents of *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* are illuminating and reveal the purpose and meaning of the author. There are eleven chapters in all entitled 'A Strange Event', 'A Shabby Show', 'A Mean Deal', 'An Abject Surrender', 'A Political Charity', 'A False Claim', 'A False Charge', 'The Real Issue', 'A Plea to the Foreigners', 'What do the Untouchables Say' 'Gandhism'. What these chapters deal with is stated under each title : 'Congress Takes Cognizance of the Untouchables', 'Congress Abandons Its Plan', 'Congress Refuses to Part with Power', 'Congress Bets (sic) an Inglorious Retreat', 'Congress Plan to Kill by Kindness', 'Does Congress Represent All?', 'Are Untouchables Tools of the British?', 'What the Untouchables Want', 'Let not Tyranny Have Freedom to Enslave', 'Beware of Mr. Gandhi !' and 'The Doom of the Untouchables'.
29. *S.W.*, Vol. 9, p. 23.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 284.



## 6

### *On the Imminence of Partition: Some Cinders*

The eighth volume of *Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches* is a reprint of *Pakistan or the Partition of India* first published in December 1940. Writing on the relevance of the book Kamal-kishor Kadam in his Foreword observes:

The book has the relevance of a historical kaleidoscope of the thoughts and events that led to the partition of the country and the course of the politics of the sub-continent. No serious student of the current political or social events in the sub-continent can afford to ignore it. One may not agree with all that has been said in it. Suffice it to say that Dr. Babasahab Ambedkar displays rare and original insight into the complex socio-political issues of his time.

Apart from these remarks on the relevance of the socio-political issues discussed at length in the book the Foreword is notable also for an enthusiastic defence of Ambedkar's analytical presentation of Indian history and Indian politics, in the course of which Kadam praises the author's objectivity and rationality. Before making a brief but meaningful comparison of Ambedkar and Gandhi, Kadam magisterially declares that though Ambedkar "was not a political star-gazer, he could read the signs of the future shock for which he wanted the people to be prepared and planned to take the later events and accidents in their strides. Behind the political drama of constitution-making there are sociological factors and historical forces and the task of a statesman is to shape the situation to reduce social miseries and

to absorb the shocks of sudden changes in which men lose their intellectual moorings. This in retrospect was the task which Dr. Ambedkar took upon himself as the true nationalist and the saviour of the Indian people."

To anyone who cares to read the book thoroughly, it is not only the presentation of the issues that carries conviction nor the writer's avowal that both Gandhi and Jinnah cited the book as an authority on the subject. What is really impressive if not amazing is the wealth of erudition brought to bear upon every significant detail. "Dr Ambedkar," Kadam avers, "writes with ease and felicity of diction that should be the theme of study by those who are to express themselves in the Queen's English or Fowler's English idioms and phrases. Dr. Ambedkar has at his command a wealth of quotations and statistics to support his point of view and the linguistic skills of a trained and sophisticated advocate. He quotes passages from Burke to Augustine Birrell."

In this apologia for Ambedkar's themes and style is also heard an echo of the general view that both Gandhi and Ambedkar were alike in their championship of the downtrodden and the Harijans. Kadam notices a basic similarity between the two. The giants, however, stand at the opposite poles of modern Indian history. The following lines epitomize Ambedkar's attitude to Gandhi:

Can any sane man go so far, for the sake of Hindu-Moslem unity ? But, Mr. Gandhi was so attached to Hindu-Moslem unity that he did not stop to enquire what he was really doing in this mad endeavour. So anxious was Mr. Gandhi in laying the foundation of Hindu-Moslem unity well and truly, that he did not forget to advise his followers regarding the national crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Most interesting of all the facts concerning Gandhi recorded by Ambedkar in this book, however, is the Mahatma's role in the Khilafat agitation. What Ambedkar discloses is stunningly unexpected. Exploding one of the myths about Non-co-operation Movement, Ambedkar vents his animus against Gandhi and his doings in the following:

The part played by Mr. Gandhi in the Khilafat agitation and the connection between the Khilafat agitation and the Non-co-operation Movement has become obscure by the reason of the fact that most people believed that it was the Congress which initiated the Non-co-operation Movement and it was done as a means for winning Swaraj. That such a view should prevail is quite understandable because most people content themselves with noting the connection between the Non-co-operation Movement and the special session of the Congress held at Calcutta on 7th and 8th September 1920. But anyone, who cares to go behind September 1920 and examine the situation as it then stood, will find that this view is not true. The truth is that the non-co-operation has its origin in the Khilafat agitation and not in the Congress Movement for Swaraj; that it was started by the Khilafatists to help Turkey and adopted by the Congress only to help the Khilafatists; that Swaraj was not its primary object, but its primary object was Khilafat and that Swaraj was added as a secondary object to induce the Hindus to join it will be evident from the following facts.<sup>2</sup>

The facts enumerated by Ambedkar lead to the inevitable conclusion that the non-co-operation movement was launched by the Khilafat Committee and that what the special session of the Congress at Calcutta did was to adopt what the Khilafat Conference had already done. Ambedkar does not fail to remind that the Khilafat Conference was not interested in Swaraj as such but only in helping the Muslims in furthering the cause of Khilafat. This, according to Ambedkar, is amply shown by the Congress Resolution passed at the special Calcutta session.

In the light of such comments, Ambedkar's attitude to Gandhi's political thinking becomes plain. His object, to begin with, is to demolish the idol and to lift the veil in which the real face of the Mahatma was wrapped up. Ambedkar's judgement is prompted by what he saw Gandhi doing on several occasions. With his searching eye fixed on contradictions he is unable to see the redeeming qualities of the man he condemns, his faith in the power of truth and non-violence, his ardent patriotism and saintly simplicity; nor is he able to realize the imperativeness

of Gandhi's participation in the Khilafat agitation. That Gandhi's political moves did not always succeed admits of no doubt; but he was not always a pacifist who took recourse to a policy of appeasement out of cowardice or fear.

Notwithstanding a trace of anger in his attitude, Ambedkar does not depart from historical verities. His reference to Gandhi's participation in the Khilafat Conference, held in Delhi on 23 November 1919 is a case in point. "The Muslims," adds Ambedkar, "were anxious to secure the support of the Hindus in the cause of Khilafat. At the Conference held on 23rd November 1919 the Muslims had invited the Hindus. Again on 3rd June 1920 a joint meeting of the Hindus and the Khilafatist Muslims was held at Allahabad. This meeting was attended among others by Sapru, Motilal Nehru and Annie Besant. But the Hindus were hesitant in joining the Muslims. Mr. Gandhi was the only Hindu who joined the Muslims."<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that in such passages as this Ambedkar seems to invite the world to look at Gandhi's words and his deeds, his theories of truth and non-violence and his practice together. But the fact is that he does more than invite. He exposes. The classical statement of the differences between him and Gandhi is contained in his comments on the 1942 Quit India Campaign:<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding this Mr. Gandhi instead of negotiating with Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League with a view to a settlement, took a different turn. He got the Congress to pass the famous Quit India Resolution on the 8th August 1942. This Quit India Resolution was primarily a challenge to the British Government. But it was also an attempt to do away with the intervention of the British Government in the discussion of the Minority question and thereby securing for the Congress a free hand to settle it on its own terms and according to its own lights. It was in effect, if not in intention, an attempt to win independence by bypassing the Muslims and the other minorities. The Quit India Campaign turned out to be a complete failure. It was a mad venture and took the most diabolical form. It was a scorch-earth campaign in which the victims of looting, arson and murder were Indians and the perpetrators were Congressmen. Beaten, he started a fast for

twenty-one days in March 1943 while he was in gaol with the object of getting out of it. He failed. Thereafter he fell ill. As he was reported to be sinking the British Government released him for fear that he might die on their hand and bring them ignominy.<sup>5</sup>

This statement of the failure of Gandhi and his campaign is important. The failure of Gandhi as a statesman is one of the major themes in Ambedkar's writings, and is closely linked to the theme of social reform. It will be remembered that Ambedkar did not appreciate Gandhi's refusal to initiate any social reform and eradicate untouchability. Gandhi was also a colossal failure in his attempt to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. Of the many instances of his failure cited by Ambedkar, one typical example is the eruption of riots in 1930-31. The Civil-Disobedience Movement, Ambedkar notes, gave rise to riots and disturbances all over the country. It is not without significance that these were mostly disturbances of a political character and that the parties involved in them were the police and the Congress volunteers, but no sooner did these disturbances break out than they took a communal twist. The reason, according to Ambedkar, was that the Muslims refused to submit to the coercive methods used by the Congress to compel them to join in Civil Disobedience. Consequently, if not expectedly, what were political riots at the outset ended in numerous and quite serious communal riots. Having cited hundreds of such cases, Ambedkar draws the painful conclusion that Gandhi failed in his unity efforts mostly on account of his unwise and indiscreet handling of complex social and political situations. Says Ambedkar: "This short historical sketch of the part Mr. Gandhi played in bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity may be concluded by a reference to the attitude of Mr. Gandhi in the negotiations about the Communal Settlement. He offered the Muslims a blank cheque. The blank cheque only served to exasperate the Muslims as they interpreted it as an act of evasion. He opposed the separate electorates at the Round Table Conference. When they were given to the Muslims by the Communal Award, Mr. Gandhi and the Congress did not approve of them. But when it came to voting upon it, they took the strange attitude of neither approving it nor opposing it."<sup>6</sup>

A similar disparagement more pointedly expressed is contained in the following lines :

Such is the record of Hindu-Muslim relationship from 1920 to 1940. Placed side by side with the frantic efforts made by Mr. Gandhi to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity, the record makes most painful and heart-rending reading. It would not be much exaggeration to say that it is a record of twenty years of civil war between the Hindus and the Muslims in India, interrupted by brief intervals of armed peace.<sup>7</sup>

The subtle impeachment, half veiled and half unconcealed, is contained in the words conveying the author's shock and grief: 'frantic efforts', 'most painful', 'heart-rending'. The contrast between 'a record of twenty years of civil war' and 'brief intervals of armed peace' brings out the futility of Gandhi's endeavours.

One final example of the centrality of certain themes in Ambedkar's writings and speeches may here be given:

The political objections to Hindu Raj rest on various grounds. The first ground is that Hindu society is not a democratic society. True, it is not. It may not be right to ask whether the Muslims have taken any part in the various movements for reforming Hindu society as distinguished from proselytising. But it is right to ask if the Musalmans are the only sufferers from the evils that admittedly result from the undemocratic character of Hindu society. Are not the millions of Shudras and non-Brahmins or millions of the Untouchables, suffering the worst consequences of the undemocratic character of Hindu society? Who benefits from education, from public service and from political reforms except the Hindu governing class—composed of the higher castes of the Hindus—which form not even 10 per cent of the total Hindu population? Has not the governing class of the Hindus, which controls Hindu politics, shown more regard for safeguarding the rights and interests of the Musalmans than they have for safeguarding the rights and interests of the Shudras and the Untouchables? Is not Mr. Gandhi, who is determined to oppose any political concession to the Untouchables, ready

to sign a blank cheque in favour of the Muslims? Indeed, the Hindu governing class seems to be far more ready to share power with the Muslims than it is to share power with the Shudras and the Untouchables. Surely, the Muslims have the least ground to complain of the undemocratic character of Hindu society.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that Ambedkar generally considers every problem, including the problem of Pakistan, from the point of view of a man possessed with some kind of deep-rooted animus against Hinduism; when he is commenting upon the Hindu plutocrats and governing classes which had forced the śūdras to languish under the vilest servitude, there is nothing else he can do. Whatever else may be said about his attitude towards Hinduism, it is surely not unreasonable to urge that the time has finally come when whoever applies the term 'biased' to him simply knows not whereof he speaks. Ambedkar provides scores of reasons to justify his ways to Hinduism upon which he does not tire of pouring scorn.

The word 'animus' used above does not fully or even adequately convey Ambedkar's motive for castigating Hinduism. What prompts him to be so scathingly critical are both reaction and reality. Generations of bondmen, of the unprivileged and the downgraded, had due to their mute submission to the free, the privileged and the well-born suffered ignominious exploitation, which is the reason why the very word 'Hindu' or 'Hinduism' provokes his ire wherever it occurs. One has only to traverse the grounds on which his political objections to Hindu Raj rest. Among these the first is that Hindu society is not democratic, as a result of which both the Muslims and the śūdras have suffered. Once again the same theme—the theme of untouchability—emerges with the same emphasis on the sufferings of the achūts. When Ambedkar is provoked by the iniquities of the caste system, of downgrading the poor sectors of the Hindu society and of marginalizing the untouchables, he is emotionally charged, his feelings bursting out in a downpour of rhetorical and other questions.

With the uncommon fearlessness of a non-partisan critic and truth-possessed savant Ambedkar rejects the concept of India as

one integral whole. His arguments are weighty, incontrovertible. They contain the truth of some inspired prophecy as well, though they are based on fact, not on fiction or make-believe. The facts in 'Pakistan: National Frustration' are historical and logically-developed. The conclusions are therefore unchallengeably reasonable. One such conclusion is that there is a philosophical justification for Pakistan. As one who had studied the course of Hindu-Muslim politics for decades and as a staunch realist, Ambedkar writes: "For the course of Hindu-Muslim politics has been marked by a tragic and ominous parallelism. The Hindus and Muslims have trodden parallel paths. No doubt, they went in the same direction. But they never travelled the same road. In 1885, the Hindus started the Congress to vindicate the political rights of Indians as against the British. The Muslims refused to be lured by the Hindus into joining the Congress. Between 1885 and 1906 the Muslims kept out of this stream of Hindu politics. In 1906 they felt the necessity for the Muslim community taking part in political activity. Even then they dug their own separate channel for the flow of Muslim political life. The flow was to be controlled by a separate political organization called the Muslim League. Ever since the formation of the Muslim League the waters of Muslim politics have flown in this separate channel. Except on rare occasions, the Congress and the League have lived apart and have worked apart. Their aims and objects have not always been the same. They have even avoided holding their annual sessions at one and the same place, lest the shadow of one should fall upon the other. It is not that the League and the Congress have not met. The two have met but only for negotiations, a few times with success and most times without success. They met in 1916 at Lucknow and their efforts were crowned with success. In 1925 they met but without success. In 1928 a section of the Muslims were prepared to meet the Congress. Another section refused to meet. It rather preferred to depend upon the British. The point is, they have met but have never merged. Only during the Khilafat agitation did the waters of the two channels leave their appointed course and flow as one stream in one channel. It was believed that nothing would separate the waters which God was pleased to join. But that hope was belied. It was found that



there was something in the composition of the two waters which would compel their separation. Within a few years of their confluence and as soon as the substance of the Khilafat cause vanished—the water from the one stream reacted violently to the presence of the other, as one does to a foreign substance entering one's body. Each began to show a tendency to throw out and to separate from the other. The result was that when the waters did separate, they did with such impatient velocity and determined violence—if one can use such language in speaking of water—against each other that thereafter they have been flowing in channels far deeper and far more distant from each other than those existing before. Indeed, the velocity and violence with which the two waters have burst out from the pool in which they had temporarily gathered have altered the direction in which they were flowing. At one time their direction was parallel. Now they are opposite. One is flowing towards the east as before. The other has started to flow in the opposite direction, towards the west. Apart from any possible objection to the particular figure of speech, I am sure, it cannot be said that this is a wrong reading of the history of Hindu-Muslim politics. If one bears this parallelism in mind, he will know that there is nothing sudden about the transformation. For if the transformation is a revolution, the parallelism in Hindu-Muslim politics marks the evolution of that revolution. That Muslim politics should have run a parallel course and should never have merged in the Hindu current of politics is a strange fact of modern Indian history. In so segregating themselves the Muslims were influenced by some mysterious feeling, the source of which they could not define and guided by a hidden hand which they could not see but which was all the same directing them to keep apart from Hindus. This mysterious feeling and this hidden hand was no other than their pre-appointed destiny, symbolized by Pakistan, which, unknown to them, was working within them. Thus viewed, there is nothing new or nothing sudden in the idea of Pakistan. The only thing that has happened is that, what was indistinct appears now in full glow, and what was nameless has taken a name.”<sup>9</sup>

The whole treatise has to be read thoroughly before its worth is grasped. In it the arguments follow one another as in a

compact work in which all the parts are indivisibly linked together and constitute an organic unity. Any argument isolated from this unity for either endorsement or rejection will break the chain and affect the organic structure, the general drift of the argument, the ebb and flow of reasoning, the rational weighing-up of the pros and cons. Though Ambedkar describes his style as prolix, it is nonetheless suited to his purpose and to the unity of ideas expressed in the book. He has indeed drawn the pleadings at sufficient length and presented the arguments for and against the partition of India, the arguments with which the two sides—the Congress and the Muslim League—"plied one another with plea and replication, rejoinder and rebutter, surrejoinder, surrebutter and so on." He does this deliberately, he claims, with the object that the case for and against Pakistan may be fully stated.

Considering the historical and literary importance of Ambedkar's collected writings and speeches and the pains taken by him to marshal his views on the various burning topics of the day—the Congress, the Hindus, and the untouchables—we have collected some 'cinders' from the flaming fire of his thought. Only the tenth volume has been rather disappointing to the literary critic. It looks like a gallimaufry of essays on miscellaneous topics, such as the need for uniformity in labour legislation, the paper control order, the Indian finance bill, the Indian boilers (amendment) bill, labour and parliamentary democracy, government policy towards labour, etc. Ambedkar does not bestow upon these topics the same attention as is given by him to casteism, Hinduism and Gandhi. But while his emphasis is on heralding a new social order free from the squalid barbarities of caste and class—a subject which he handles leisurely more than once in his work—it is social democracy and courage to rethink that he radically proposes for the liberation of the suppressed classes. His writings and speeches contain much else besides; for to treat of this subject—namely, the liberation of the suppressed classes—in isolation and not to examine it in the context of Hinduism as a whole would be, he not unreasonably believes, like drawing one's picture without eyes, and he therefore has recourse to a description of Gandhi's attitude to the problems of caste and class. His main topics in the second part of the book

are, briefly, the grievances of the scheduled castes, a critique of the proposals of the Cabinet Mission and the untouchables; but his treatment ranges over wider fields in a laudable attempt to provide an authentic perspective. For this task Ambedkar was preeminently qualified and equipped; and his work is comprehensive in consequence, being rich in detail and filled with scraps of learning gathered from various sources, all well-digested and lucidly set forth.

The themes of Part I, Vol. X are so varied that they cannot be summed up in a sentence or two. Their wide range includes, besides those mentioned above, promotion of labour welfare in India, mica industry, labour legislation, post-war electric power development, and labour policy of the government of India. In whatever capacity Ambedkar worked, the scheduled castes were predominantly before him, but this does not exhaust his interest. He also points, without prejudice, to new and important themes which are of considerable interest to this day. His brief comments on current questions, such as the following on industrialization of India, are noteworthy:

The result is that at the end of a decade we are left with a negative balance between population and production and a constant squeezing of the standard of living. At every decade this negative balance between population and production is increasing in an alarming degree, leaving India with the inheritance of poverty, more poverty and chronic poverty. A rot has set in. This rot, I feel sure, is not going to be stopped by organizing agricultural exhibitions or animal shows or by propaganda in favour of better manuring. It can stop only when agriculture is made profitable. Nothing can open possibilities of making agriculture in India profitable except a serious drive in favour of industrialization. For it is industrialization alone which can drain away the excess of population which is exerting such enormous pressure on land into gainful occupations other than agriculture.

To sum up, our Reconstruction Committees are no doubt modelled, so far as intention and purpose is concerned, on the Reconstruction Committees which have come into existence in most European countries whose industrial organi-

zation has been destroyed by the Germans. The problems of reconstruction differ, and must differ from country to country. In some countries the problem of reconstruction is a problem of reconditioning of rundown plant and machinery.<sup>10</sup>

Of no less intrinsic value as a witness to the growing concern with the problem of reconstruction in India, is Ambedkar's statement that the problem here is essentially different from the problem of reconstruction in other countries. In other countries, he asserts, the problem is one of rehabilitation of industry which has been in existence. In India, as Ambedkar sees it, it is a problem of industrialization. He is not alone in thinking that in the ultimate sense the problem is mainly a problem of the removal of chronic poverty. His defence of India's export policy is bold, witness the confidence and conviction reflected in the following speech on the government policy *re* mineral resources of India:

I propose now to turn to some of the specific points of which Mr. Neogy had given notice to me. The first point to which he has referred was the export of minerals. I would like to assure the House that in the contemplated legislation there will undoubtedly be provisions for dealing with the export of minerals outside India. The question really is whether we can completely stop the export of our minerals. The answer to that question must necessarily depend upon another question, namely, shall we be able to import those minerals in which India is deficient if we completely stop the export of our own minerals? As Honourable Members are aware, India is in fact deficient in such important minerals as oil, copper, lead, zinc, tin and sulphur. Consequently the question of export has to be considered in the light of the effect it may produce on our ability to import things of which we have a deficiency. The course which appears safest to the Government of India is to regulate the export of those minerals of which we are in short supply and which are necessary for the industrial development of the country, and secondly to see that our minerals are not exported in a raw condition but that we establish in our own country such industries as will enable us to process the raw material before it is exported to other countries.<sup>11</sup>

When ridiculing the flagrant absurdities of an argument, Ambedkar eschews unparliamentary language, avoids using sesquipedalian and highly technical words in his attempt to refute the pleas of the opposition. The sturdy reasonableness of his argument clothed in simple words is absolutely appealing. Who will deny that India's greatest problem is the problem of poverty and that poverty and social reform cannot be delinked ? Ultimately, it is related to the problem of social justice or injustice.

Ambedkar's addresses, speeches and replies derive their appeal from systematic ordering of arguments as well as from his intelligent understanding of a problem. These qualities, which were inborn in him, helped him to develop his confidence and made him an active, efficient parliamentarian whose replies and speeches were listened to with rapt attention. The sixty-eight topics listed in the first part of the volume throw ample light on his exploring and searching mind as well as on his versatility.

In the second part of the volume the first section contains a confidential memorandum of grievances of the scheduled castes which was submitted on October 29, 1942 to the Governor-General. The grievances listed in the memorandum are political, educational and miscellaneous. Political grievances, dealt with in the first part, include inadequate representation of these classes in the central legislature as well as in the central executive and absence of representation in the Public Services and on the Federal Public Services Commission. In Part II, which deals with educational grievances, Ambedkar lists two: want of aid for university and advanced education and want of facilities for technical training. In Part III, in which other grievances have been listed, Ambedkar demands adequate publicity of the social and political grievances of the scheduled castes and a special provision for securing for the members of these castes a footing in the Government's contract system in the Public Works Department. Part IV of the Memorandum sets out to define the duty of the government towards the distressed classes.

Apart from the light this list throws on the grievances of the scheduled castes, it also points to the animating purpose of Ambedkar's activities in 1942. Oft-repeated and long-standing as these grievances are, they are nevertheless not with-

out their interest in historical perspective. Like Ambedkar's earlier writings, his letters and other documents appear to have—do indeed have—only one principal object—namely, to secure full redress for the grievances of the scheduled castes. The list is not also without a certain historical interest; it throws light on what Ambedkar felt about reservation and the representation of the scheduled castes in the central legislature and executive. It also demands an assurance of fair representation in the Public Services.

The following cinders have gone into the making of the inflammatory writings of Ambedkar; they are fire summaries of his unorthodox weltanschauung.

- \* Caste in the singular number is an unreality. Castes exist only in the plural number. There is no such thing as a caste. [I.20]
- \* Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot and has not improved the race. Caste has however done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus. [I.50]
- \* The Hindus must consider whether they must not cease to worship the past as supplying its ideals. [I.79]
- \* The sanctity of Caste and *Varna* can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the *Shastras*. [I.87]
- \* The Ministers of the country, who are the first citizens of the country, should lead a life which is cultured, which cares for art, which cares for learning, and which ought to be a model for the rest. [II.171]
- \* The Depressed Classes cannot consent to subject themselves to majority rule in their present state of hereditary bondsmen. Before majority rule is established their emancipation from the system of untouchability must be an accomplished fact. [II.546]
- \* Manu was a staunch believer in social inequality and he knew the danger of admitting religious Equality. If I am equal before God why am I not equal on earth? Manu was probably terrified by this question. Rather than admit and allow religious equality to effect social inequality he preferred to deny religious equality. [III.36]

- \* A Hindu is social but not moral in the strict sense of the term. A Hindu takes no responsibility for the ends he serves. He is a willing tool in the hands of his society, content to follow. He is not a free agent not afraid to differ. His notions of sin give remarkable proof of his unmoral character. [III.83]
- \* The Hindu is caste-conscious. He is also class conscious. Whether he is caste conscious or class conscious depends upon the caste with which he comes in conflict. [III.146]
- \* The Aryans allowed their women to have sexual intercourse with any one of the class of Devas in the interest of good breeding. This practice prevailed so extensively that the Devas came to regard prelibation in respect of the Aryan women as their prescriptive right. No Aryan woman could be married unless the right of prelibation had been redeemed and the woman released from the control of the Devas by offering what was technically called *Avadan*. [III. 156]
- \* The Aryan community of Buddha's time was steeped in the worst kind of debauchery: social, religious and spiritual. [III.168]
- \* To mention only a few of the social evils, attention may be drawn to gambling. Gambling had become as widespread among the Aryans as drinking. [III.168]
- \* Rig-Veda contains lamentations of a poor Aryan ruined by gambling. [III.169]
- \* Drinking was another evil which was rampant among the Aryans. Liquors were of two sorts *Soma* and *Sura*. *Soma* was a sacrificial wine. The drinking of the *Soma* was in the beginning permitted only to Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. Subsequently it was permitted only to Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The Vaishyas were excluded from it and the Shudras were never permitted to taste it. Its manufacture was a secret known only to the Brahmins. *Sura* was open to all and was drunk by all. The Brahmins also drank *Sura*. [III.169]
- \* The Mahabharata mentions an occasion when both *Krishna* and *Arjuna* were dead drunk. That shows that the best among the Aryan society were not only not free from the

drink habit but that they drank heavily. The most shameful part of it was that even the Aryan women were addicted to drink. For instance, *Sudeshna*, the wife of king *Virat*, tells her maid *Sairandhri* to go to *Kichaka's* palace and bring *Sura* as she was dying to have a drink. [III.169]

In the Rig-Veda there is an episode related to Yama and Yami brother and sister. According to this episode, Yami the sister invites her brother Yama to cohabit with her and becomes angry when he refuses to do so.

A father could marry his daughter. *Vashishta* married his own daughter *Shatrupa* when she came of age. *Manu* married his daughter *Ila*. *Janhu* married his daughter *Janhavi*. *Surya* married his daughter *Usha*. There was polyandri not of the ordinary type. The polyandri prevalent among the Aryans was a polyandri when Kinsmen cohabited with one woman. *Dhahaprachetani* and his son *Soma* cohabited with *Marisha* the daughter of *Soma*.

Instances of grandfather marrying his grand-daughter are not wanting. *Daksha* gave his daughter in marriage to his father *Brahma* and from that marriage was born the famous *Narada*. *Dauhitra* gave his 27 daughters to his father *Soma* for cohabitation and procreation. [III.171]

In the Aryan religion there are five sacrificial animals mentioned. In this list of sacrificial animals man came first. The sacrifice of a man was the costliest. [III.174]

For a human sacrifice the Brahmin allowed as a substitute for a live man, a man of straw or metal or earth. But they did altogether give up human sacrifice for fear that this *Yadna* might be stopped and they should lose their fees. [III.174-75]

In the *Suttanipat* a description is given of the *Yadna* that was arranged to be performed by *Pasenadi*, king of *Kosala*. It is stated that there were tied to the poles for slaughter at the *Yadna* five hundred oxen, five hundred bulls, five hundred cows, five hundred goats and five hundred lambs and that the servants of the king who were detailed to do the jobs according to the orders given to them by the officiating Brahmin priests were doing their duties with tears in their eyes. [III.175]



- \* The principle of inequality which is the basis of the caste system had become well established and it was against this principle that Buddha carried on a determined and a bitter fight. How strongly was he opposed to the pretensions of the Brahmins for superiority over the other classes and how convincing were the grounds of his opposition are to be found in many of his dialogues. The most important one of these is known as the Ambattha Sutta. [III.204]
- \* The Muslim invaders destroyed only the outward symbols of Hindu religion such as temples and Maths etc. They did not extirpate Hinduism nor did they cause any subversion of the principles or doctrines which governed the spiritual life of the people. The effects of the Brahmanic invasions were a thorough-going change in the principles which Buddhism had preached for a century as true and eternal principles of spiritual life and which had been accepted and followed by the masses as the way of life. To alter the metaphor the Muslim invaders only stirred the waters in the bath and that too only for a while. Thereafter they got tired of stirring and left the waters with the sediments to settle. They never threw the baby—if one can speak of the principles of Hinduism as a baby—out of the bath. Brahmanism in its conflict with Buddhism made a clean sweep. It emptied the bath with the Buddhist Baby in it and filled the bath with its own waters and placed in it its own baby. [III.274]
- \* The relation of the sexes among the Aryans was of a loose sort. There was a time when they did not know marriage as a permanent tie between a man and a woman. This is evident from the Mahabharata where Kunti the wife of Pandu refers to this in her reply to Pandu's exhortation to go to produce children from some one else. [IV.109]
- \* There was a communism in women. It was a simple communism where many men shared a woman and no one had a private property in or exclusive right over a woman. In such a communism the woman was called Ganika, belonging to many. There was also a regulated form of communism in women among the Aryans. In this the woman was shared among a group of men but the day of each was fixed

and the woman was called *Warangana*, one whose days are fixed. Prostitution flourished and has taken the worst form. Nowhere else have prostitutes consented to submit to sexual intercourse in public. But the practice existed among the ancient Aryans. Bestiality also prevailed among the ancient Aryans, and among those who were guilty of it are to be reckoned some of the most reverend Rishis. [IV.109]

- \* The ancient Aryans were also a race of drunkards. Wine formed a most essential part of their religion. The Vedic Gods drank wine. The divine wine was called Soma. Since the Gods of the Aryans drank wine the Aryans had no scruples in the matter of drinking. Indeed to drink it was a part of an Aryan's religious duty. [IV.109]
- \* Since when did vegetarianism come into India? When did Ahimsa become an established belief? There are Hindus who do not understand the propriety of this question. They hold that vegetarianism and Ahimsa are not new things in India. [IV.111]
- \* Flesh eating was thus quite common. From the Brahmins to the Shudras everybody ate meat. In the Dharmasutras numerous rules are given about the flesh of beasts and birds and about fishes. [IV.112]
- \* The question that arises is does Shiva accept animal sacrifice? The answer to this question is that at one time Shiva did live on animal sacrifice. This statement may come as a surprise to the present-day worshippers of Shiva. But it is a fact and those who need any evidence in support of it, have only to refer to the Ashvalayan Grihya-Sutra which gives a most elaborate description of a bull-sacrifice for the appeasement of Shiva. [IV.125]
- \* Brahma's claim to be the first born was false. He was punished by Shiva for making it. Vishnu gets the right to call himself the first born. But that is allowed to him by the grace of Shiva. The followers of Brahma had their revenge on Vishnu for stealing what rightfully belonged to him with the help of Shiva. So they manufactured another legend according to which Vishnu emanated from Brahma's nostrils in the shape of a pig and grew naturally into a

boar—a very mean explanation of Vīshnu's avatar as a boar. [IV.172]

- \* The rivalry among these Gods had taken the shape of rivalry among traders and results in indecent abuse of Shiva by Vishnu and of Vishnu by Shiva. [IV.172]
- \* What a chaos? Why could the Brahmins not give a uniform, and consistent explanation of the origin of the four Varnas?

On the issue of who created them, there is no uniformity. The Rig-Veda says the four Varnas were created by Prajapati. It does not mention which Prajapati. One would like to know which Prajapati it was who created the four Varnas. For there are so many Prajapatis. But even on the point of creation by Prajapati there is no agreement. One says they were created by Brahman. Another says they were created by Kassapa. The third says they were created by Manu.

On the issue how many Varnas, the creator—whoever he was—created, again there is no uniformity. The Rig-Veda says four Varnas were created. But other authorities say only two Varnas were created, some say Brahmans and Kshatriyas and some say Brahmana and Shudras.

On the issue the relations intended by the creator for binding together the four Varnas the Rig-Veda lays down the rule of graded inequality based on the importance of the part of the creation from which the particular Varna was born. But the white Yajur-Veda denies this theory of the Rig-Veda. So also the Upanishad, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. Indeed the Hari Vansha goes to the length of saying that the Shudras are twice born.

This chaos seems to be the result of concoction of the theory of Chaturvarna which the Brahmins quietly singled into the Rig-Veda contrary to established traditions. [IV. 203-04]

- \* The religion of the Vedic Aryans was full of barbaric and obscene observances. Human sacrifice formed a part of their religion and was called Naramedhayagna. Most elaborate descriptions of the rite are found in the Yajur-Veda Samhita. [IV.294]

The morals of the Ancient Aryans were no better than their religion. The Aryans were a race of gamblers. Gambling was developed by them into a science in very early days of the Aryan civilization so much so that they had even devised the dice and given them certain technical terms. The luckiest dice was called Krit and the unluckiest was called Kali. Treta and Dwapara were intermediate between them. Not only was gambling well developed among the ancient Aryans but they did not play without stakes. They gambled with such abandon that there is really no comparison with their spirit of gambling. Kingdoms and even wives were offered as stakes at gambling. King Nala staked his kingdom and lost it. The Pandvas went much beyond. They not only staked their kingdom but they also staked their wife, Draupadi, and lost both. Among the Aryans gambling was not the game of the rich. It was a vice of the many. [IV.295]

The class composition in other countries was based on economic and social considerations. Slavery and serfdom had no foundation in religion. Untouchability though it can give and does economic advantages to the Hindus, is primarily based on religion. [V.89]

Not having conscience, the Hindu has no such thing in him as righteous indignation against the inequities and injustices from which the Untouchable has been suffering. He sees no wrong in these inequities and injustices and refuses to budge. By his absence of conscience the Hindu is a great obstacle in the path of the removal of untouchability. [V.99]

The discriminations against the Untouchables are merely the reflections of that deep and strong Hindu sentiment which is carried over in law and administration which justifies the making of distinctions between Hindus and Untouchables to the disadvantage of the Untouchables. Those discriminations have their roots in fear of the Hindus that in a free field, the Untouchables may rise above the prescribed station in life and become a menace to the Hindu Social Order the cardinal principle of which is the maintenance of Hindu superiority and Hindu

domination over the Untouchables. So long as the Hindu Social Order lasts, discriminations against the Untouchables continue to exist. [V.III]

- \* It is to mark this difference in culture that the Hindus invented a new terminology which recognized two classes of Shudras, (1) Sat-Shudras and (2) Shudras. Calling the old body of Shudras as Sat-Shudras or cultured Shudras and using the term Shudras to those comprizing (sic) the primitive castes who had come within the pale of Hindu Civilization. The new terminology did not mean any difference in the rights and duties of Shudras. [V.166]
- \* Three characteristic features of Hindu Social Organization: (1) Caste, (2) A hierarchial System of Castes, and (3) A Class System cutting into the Caste System. Undoubtedly the structure is a very complicated one and it is perhaps difficult for one who has not been woven into it to form a true mental picture of the same. [V.166]
- \* Did Mr. Gandhi settle any of these unsettled problems? I think it is not unfair to say that Mr. Gandhi created fresh disunity in the Conference. He began the childish game of ridiculing every Indian delegate. He questioned their honesty, he questioned their representative character. He taunted the liberals as arm-chair politicians and as leaders without any followers. To the Muslims he said that he represented the Muslim masses better than they did.
- \* He claimed that the Depressed Class delegates did not represent the Depressed Classes and that he did. This was the refrain which he repeated *ad nauseum* at the end of every speech. The non-Congress delegates deserve the thanks of all honest people for their having tolerated this nonsense and arrogance of Mr. Gandhi and collaborated with him to save him and to save the country from his mistake. [V.288]
- \* Apart from this discourtesy to fellow-delegates, did Mr. Gandhi stand up for the cause he came to champion? He did not. His conduct of affairs was ignominious. Instead of standing up and fighting he began to yield on issues on which he ought never to have ceased fire. He yielded to the Princes and agreed that their representatives in the Federal

legislature should be nominated by them and not elected, as demanded by their subjects. He yielded to the conservatives and consented to be content with provincial autonomy and not to insist upon central responsibility for which many lakhs of Indians went to gaol. The only people to whom he would not yield were the minorities—the only party to whom he could have yielded with honour to himself and advantage to the country. [V.288-89]

Nothing has helped so much to shatter the prestige of Mr. Gandhi as going to the Round Table Conference. The spectacle of Mr. Gandhi at the Round Table Conference must have been painful to many of his friends. He was not fitted to play the role he undertook to play. No country has ever sent a delegate to take part in the framing of the constitution who was so completely unequipped in training and in study. Gandhi went to the Round Table Conference with a song of the saint Narsi Mehta on his tongue. [V.289]

It would have been better for him and better for his country if he had taken in his arm pit a volume on comparative constitutional law. Devoid of any knowledge of the subject he was called upon to deal with, he was quite powerless to destroy the proposals put forth by the British or to meet them with his alternatives. No wonder Mr. Gandhi, taken out of the circle of his devotees and placed among politicians, was at sea. At every turn he bungled and finding that he could not even muddle through, he gave up the game and returned to India. [V.289]

The Untouchables must retain their right to freedom of speech and freedom of action on the floor of the Legislature if they are to ventilate their grievances and obtain redress of their wrongs by political action. But this freedom of speech and action has been lost by the representatives of the Untouchables who have joined the Congress. They cannot vote as they like, they cannot speak what they think. They cannot ask a question, they cannot move a resolution and they cannot bring in a Bill. [V.344]

Not being a radical party the Congress cannot be trusted to undertake a radical programme of social and economic

reconstruction without which the Untouchables can never succeed in improving their lot. For the Untouchables to join such a party is a futile and senseless thing. The Congress will not do anything for them but will only use them as they have done. [V.346]

- \* The Untouchables simply detest the name Harijan. Various grounds of objection are urged against the name. In the first place it has not bettered their position. It has not elevated them in the eyes of the Hindus. The new name has become completely identified with the subject matter of the old. Everybody knows that Harijans are simply no other than the old Untouchables. The new name provides no escape to the Untouchables from the curse of Untouchability. With the new name they are damned as much as they were with the old. Secondly, the Untouchables say that they prefer to be called Untouchables. They argue that it is better that the wrong should be called by its known name. [V.363]
- \* This application of the utility of the cow did not prevent the Aryan from killing the cow for purposes of food. Indeed the cow was killed because the cow was regarded as sacred. [VII.324]
- \* That the Aryans of the Rig Veda did kill cows for purposes of food and ate beef is abundantly clear from the Rig Veda itself. In Rig Veda (X.86.14) Indra says:— "They cook for one 15 plus twenty oxen." The Rig Veda (X.91.14) says that for Agni were sacrificed horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams. From the Rig Veda (X.72.6) it appears that the cow was killed with a sword or axe. [Ibid.]
- \* The killing of cow for the guest had grown to such an extent that the guest came to be called 'Go-ghna' which means the killer of the cow. To avoid this slaughter of the cows the Ashavalayana Grhya Sutra (1.24.25) suggests that the cow should be let loose when the guest comes so as to escape the rule of etiquette. [VII.326]
- \* Such is the state of the evidence on the subject of cow-killing and beef-eating. Which part of it is to be accepted as true? The correct view is that the testimony of the Satapatha Brahmana and the Apastamba Dharma Sutra

in so far as it supports the view that Hindus were against cow-killing and beef-eating, are merely exhortations against the excesses of cow-killing and not prohibitions against cow-killing. Indeed the exhortations prove that cow-killing and eating of beef had become a common practice. That notwithstanding these exhortations cow-killing and beef-eating continued. That most often they fell on deaf ears is proved by the conduct of Yajnavalkya, the great Rishi of the Aryans. [VII.327]

- \* I am not staggered by Pakistan; I am not indignant about it; nor do I believe that it can be smashed by shooting into it similes and metaphors. Those who believe in shooting it by similes should remember that nonsense does not cease to be nonsense because it is put in rhyme, and that a metaphor is no argument though it be sometimes the gunpowder to drive one home and imbed it in memory. I believe that it would be neither wise nor possible to reject summarily a scheme if it has behind it the sentiment, if not the passionate support, of 90 p.c. Muslims of India. I have no doubt that the only proper attitude to Pakistan is to study it in all its aspects, to understand its implications and to form an intelligent judgement about it. [VIII.7-8]
- \* The British cannot consent to settle power upon an aggressive Hindu majority and make it its heir, leaving it to deal with the minorities at its sweet pleasure. That would not be ending imperialism. It would be creating another imperialism. The Hindus, therefore, cannot avoid coming to grips with Pakistan, much as they would like to do. [VIII.9]
- \* Every Indian must read a book on Pakistan, if not this, then some other, if he wants to help his country to steer a clear path. [VIII.17]
- \* Views I have. Some of them are expressed, others may have to be gathered. Two things, however, may well be said about my views. In the first place, wherever they are expressed, they have been reasoned out. Secondly, whatever the views, they have certainly not the fixity of a popular prejudice. They are really thoughts and not views. In other words, I have an open mind, though not an



empty mind. A person with an open mind is always the subject of congratulations. [VIII.17-18]

- \* The reader may complain that I have been provocative in stating the relevant facts. I am conscious that such a charge may be levelled against me. I apologize freely and gladly for the same. My excuse is that I have no intention to hurt. I had only one purpose, that is, to force the attention of the indifferent and casual reader to the issue that is dealt with in the book. [VIII.18]
- \* That a large majority of the Muslims belong to the same race as the Hindus is beyond question. That all Mahomedans do not speak a common tongue, that many speak the same language as the Hindus cannot be denied. That there are certain social customs which are common to both cannot be gainsaid. That certain religious rites and practices are common to both is also a matter of fact. But the question is: can all this support the conclusion that the Hindus and the Mahomedans on account of them constitute one nation or these things have fostered in them a feeling that they long to belong to each other? [VIII.33]
- \* As a matter of historical experience, neither race, nor language, nor country has sufficed to mould a people into a nation. [VIII.34]
- \* Are there any common historical antecedents which the Hindus and Muslims can be said to share together as matters of pride or as matters of sorrow? That is the crux of the question. That is the question which the Hindus must answer, if they wish to maintain that Hindus and Musalmans together form a nation. So far as this aspect of their relationship is concerned, they have been just two armed battalions warring against each other. There was no common cycle of participation for a common achievement. Their past is a past of mutual destruction—a past of mutual animosities, both in the political as well as in the religious fields. As Bhai Parmanand points out in his pamphlet called “The Hindu National Movement”:— “In history the Hindus revere the memory of Prithvi Raj, Partap, Shivaji and, Beragi Bir, who fought for the honour and freedom of this land (against the Muslims), while the

- Mahomedans look upon the invaders of India, like Muhammad Bin Qasim and rulers like Aurangzeb as their national heroes." In the religious field, the Hindus draw their inspiration from the Ramayan, the Mahabharat, and the Geeta. The Musalmans, on the other hand, derive their inspiration from the Quran and the Hadis. Thus, the things that divide are far more vital than the things which unite. In depending upon certain common features of Hindu and Mahomedan social life, in relying upon common language, common race and common country, the Hindu is mistaking what is accidental and superficial for what is essential and fundamental. The political and religious antagonisms divide the Hindus and the Musalmans far more deeply than the so-called common things are able to bind them together. [VIII.35-36]
- \* The pity of it is that the two communities can never forget or obliterate their past. Their past is imbedded in their religion, and for each to give up its past is to give up its religion. To hope for this is to hope in vain. [VIII.37]

## NOTES

1. *W.S.*, Vol. 8, p. 155.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 409.
5. *Loc. cit.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 8, pp. 337-38.
10. Vol. X, p. 127.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.

## Conclusion

Some consider Ambedkar the greatest, the most militant champion of the depressed classes; others regret his views on Hinduism and the Vedas. That some of his ideas have entered powerfully into the mainstream of current thinking about casteism and job-reservation for the submerged masses is undeniable. Much of his language and thought is used by many Indian politicians today; but whereas Ambedkar's dalit background influenced all his thinking, his followers are swayed mostly by vested political interests. No wonder the Hindu society continues to be caste-ridden, an Augean stable to clean out. Among the well-born and the 'out-castes' of Indian rural society there are still deep cleavages. The savarnas, the upper crust of Hindu society consisting of the so-called chosen castes continue to keep themselves as an elitist group apart (except for some liberals). And the backward communities still have ambivalent feelings towards the śūdras, at least in rural society. The pioneering efforts of Babasahab Bhimrao Ambedkar, his magnificent exertions, his powerful and passionate strivings in the socio-political arena—all against powerful opposition from the orthodox—have not yet destroyed the 'devastating system of gradation and degradation which has divided the entire Indian and particularly Hindu society'.

Ambedkar's lengthy essay *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) shows all the rambles and resources of indignation and is an account of his doctrine that is the cornerstone of his way of thinking. He has devoted separate studies to the problems of castes in India and universal adult suffrage and franchise. Though the antagonism between one caste and another, between reservationists and those opposing them still persists—it has in fact been given an added fillip by casteist politics—the seeds of opposition to caste-based elitism and oligarchy have been sown and the imagination

pictures their impending ruin before long. Ambedkar's writings and speeches remind us every moment of our most sacred obligation to reject birth as a determining factor in fixing the place of an individual in society. But if the erring Hindus persistently refuse to heed the voice that calls upon them with pitying love to kill the monster of caste, they will at last invite the monster itself to kill them. A society riddled with a morbid antipathy to large chunks of its population consisting of 'various original categories of inhabitants' has no right to exist in a democratic set-up as it cannot espouse and sustain a system of equality which alone can palliate the existing differences among the various sections. Hindu society, as Ambedkar sees it, is pyramidal in structure with the caste Hindus occupying the apex, the untouchables at the base, and the backwards in between. Emancipation of the slaving, sub-humanised menial masses, the panchamas, must bring a change in the bottom part of the pyramid, in other words the division between the savarnas and panchamas must be blurred legally and socially. It is at the broad base of this pyramid that the dalits of the panchama classes are at present slotted in. There is nothing irreligious, says Ambedkar, in working for the destruction of such a pyramid. "Indeed," he declares, "I hold that it is your bounden duty to tear the mask, to remove the misrepresentation that is caused by misnaming this law as Religion. This is an essential step for you. Once you clear the minds of the people of this misconception and enable them to realize that what they are told as Religion is not Religion but that it is really Law, you will be in a position to urge for its amendment or abolition."

The edifice of castes raised by Hinduism has not, in Ambedkar's view, crumbled despite all that some reformers claim to have done in this regard. Was not the political movement the leaders like Gandhi led designed to establish a society free from social cleavages and social antagonisms and a truly democratic rule in the country? Far from it, maintains Ambedkar. What they did throughout the Freedom Movement did not produce any tangible result: it merely consolidated the hold of the system, of casteocracy over the depressed dalit layers of society. The reason, according to Ambedkar, is that the Congress was notoriously indifferent to social reform and as

such to the plight of the *śūdra-panchama* sector of our populace and that Gandhi saw "great virtue in a Brahmin remaining a Brahmin all his life."

Ambedkar's disagreement with Gandhi, of whom generally he thinks rather unkindly, stems from the Mahatma's vehement opposition to the recognition of the untouchables as a separate element in the national life of India. Gandhi, he recalls again and again, opposed their recognition at the Round Table Conference and when he found that notwithstanding his opposition they were recognized as a separate element by the Communal Award of Ramsay Macdonald he threatened to fast unto death. Again in 1945 at the First Simla Conference he had raised his opposition when he discovered that the British Government had given the untouchables recognition as a separate element. Ambedkar also recalls how Gandhi, who had forged the weapon of *satyagraha* and led the Congress to practise it against the British Government for winning Swaraj, did not give his support to the *satyagraha* organized by the untouchables against the Hindus, though its object was to establish their right to take water from public wells and to enter public Hindu temples. To Ambedkar it is regrettable that of the twenty-one fasts undertaken till 1945 by the Mahatma, there was not one undertaken for the removal of untouchability. He lists scores of grievances against the Congress and Gandhi in his *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* and *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables*. His view of the Mahatma is contained in a lucid, indicting paragraph:

Does the Mahatma practise what he preaches? One does not like to make personal reference in an argument which is general in its application. But when one preaches a doctrine and holds it as a dogma there is a curiosity to know how far he practises what he preaches. It may be that his failure to practise is due to the ideal being too high to be attainable; it may be that his failure to practise is due to the innate hypocrisy (sic) of the man. In any case he exposes his conduct to examination... The Mahatma is a Bania by birth. His ancestors had abandoned trading in favour of minister-ship which is a calling of the Brahmins. In his own life,

before he became a Mahatma, when occasion came for him to choose his career he preferred law to scales. On abandoning law he became half saint and half politician. He has never touched trading which is his ancestral calling. His youngest son—I take one who is a faithful follower of his father—born a Vaishya has married a Brahmin's daughter and has chosen to serve a newspaper magnate. The Mahatma is not known to have condemned him for not following him (sic) ancestral calling. It may be wrong and uncharitable to judge an ideal by its worst specimens. But surely the Mahatma as a specimen has no better and if he even fails to realize the ideal then the ideal must be an impossible ideal quite opposed to the practical instincts of man . . . When can a calling be deemed to have become an ancestral calling so as to make it binding on a man? Must man follow his ancestral calling even if it does not suit his capacities, even when it has ceased to be profitable? Must a man live by his ancestral calling even if he finds it to be immoral? . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Ambedkar, with his talent for polemics, bears down with particular force on all those defenders of the Hindu caste-system who forget that caste has ruined the Hindus, that the reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of *chaturvarnya* is impossible because the *Varṇavyavasthā* is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. The effect of such a reorganization, writes Ambedkar, "is to degrade the masses by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed." Such ideas will scarcely please the sectarian popularizers and upholders of casteism who imagine that 'the many-millions Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes' can even now be 'doped by verbal hopes'. Voicing Ambedkar's own conviction, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer says: "Skin-deep equality and cultural cosmetics may appear to meet legal needs, but soul-deep social justice is a therapeutic operation, where marginalised groups suffer discriminatory leprosy, demanding effective action. We must establish a new dharma fine-tuned to a dynamic nationalism, where egalitarian values catalyse a new community solidarity, sans castes, sans disabilities, sans social suppression."<sup>2</sup>

Ignoring with typical shrewdness the claims of men like Gandhi and Savarkar to be the well-wishers of the Hindus, Ambedkar draws attention to the fallacies inherent in their approach to important national issues and gives the impression of examining controversial subjects like a committed advocate rather than an open-minded scholar. He attacks Savarkar from the position of a controversialist by exposing his attitude, so full of contradictions, to the question of India's partition. Though Savarkar admits that India cannot be assumed to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, yet he insists that India shall not be divided into two parts, one for the Muslims and the other for the Hindus. What intrigues Ambedkar is that though to Savarkar the Muslims are a separate nation and have therefore a right to cultural autonomy and a national flag, yet he is opposed to the demand of the Muslim nation for a separate national home. "If he claims a national home for the Hindu nation," Ambedkar asks, "how can he refuse the claim of the Muslim nation for a national home?" No less intriguing to Ambedkar is Savarkar's advocacy that the two nations shall dwell in one country and shall live under the mantle of one single constitution and that the constitution shall be such that the Hindu nation will be enabled to occupy a predominant position that is due to it. In Savarkar's scheme of things, Ambedkar asserts, the Muslim nation shall have to live in the position of subordinate cooperation with the Hindu nation. "This alternative of Mr. Savarkar to Pakistan," Ambedkar maintains, "has about it a frankness, boldness, and definiteness which distinguishes it from the irregularity, vagueness and indefiniteness which characterizes the Congress declarations about minority rights. Mr. Savarkar's scheme has at least the merit of telling the Muslims, thus far and no further. The Muslims know where they are with regard to the Hindu Maha Sabha. On the other hand, with the Congress the Muslims find themselves nowhere because the Congress has been treating the Muslim and the minority question as a game in diplomacy, if not in duplicity."<sup>3</sup>

Ambedkar perceptively diagnoses Gandhi's intransigence, his irreconcilableness, his determination to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity—in a phrase, his failure as a statesman. He does not conceal Gandhi's tenacious contradictions, his blindnesses

and follies. He refers particularly to what he calls 'the project of an invasion of India', 'the most dangerous project' from which 'every sane Indian would dissociate himself', 'so mad a project'. Gandhi, Ambedkar reveals, did not care for those Hindus who were opposed to joining the Muslims in the Non-co-operation Movement for the reason that the Muslims might invite the Afghans to invade India. To such Hindus Gandhi said: "In my opinion, the best way to prevent India from becoming the battleground between the forces of Islam and those of the English is for Hindus to make non-co-operation a complete and immediate success, and I have little doubt that, if the Mohammedans remain true to their declared intention and are able to exercise self-restraint and make sacrifices, the Hindus will 'play the game' and join them in the campaign of non-co-operation." Reluctant to listen to the advice of Gandhi, the Muslims also refused to accept the principle of non-violence or to wait for Swaraj. In a hurry to find the most expeditious means of helping Turkey and saving the Khilafat, the Muslims, according to Ambedkar, did exactly what the Hindus feared they would do, namely, invite the Afghans to invade India. It is not possible to discover the part played by Gandhi in this project but, declares Ambedkar, Gandhi did not dissociate himself from it. As a matter of fact his misguided zeal for Swaraj and his obsession with Hindu-Muslim unity as the only means of achieving it, led the Mahatma to support the project. Having thus expressed his view of Gandhi, Ambedkar then queries: can any sane man go so far, for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity?

The disquisitions on 'Pakistan: A Nation Calling for a Home' and 'Pakistan: Break-up of Unity' destroy all the thick jungles of misconceptions that have grown around the Muslim period of Indian history. They are brimful of interesting matter-of-fact details marshalled by the sceptical, discerning and iconoclastic author that Ambedkar was. These sections of his *Pakistan or the Partition of India* call for a special and thorough study.

Ambedkar's arraignment of Tilak, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on the ground of their partisan casteist and sectarian outlook is too well-known to be repeated here. Casteism being anathema to Ambedkar, any person, howsoever great or popular, having casteist tendencies was an exploitative



menace, a sponger, a parasite. Though Tilak had acquired the reputation of being the father of the Swaraj Movement, his antipathy to the servile classes was, according to Ambedkar, quite well-known. He described these classes as those of oil-pressers, tobacco-shopkeepers, washermen, etc. and failed to know the reason why they wanted to go into the legislature. In his opinion, Ambedkar discloses, the business of these people was to obey the laws and not to aspire for power to make laws. Turning to Vallabhbhai Patel's mentality, Ambedkar refers to an incident that took place in 1942 when Lord Linlithgow had invited 52 important Indians representing different sections of the people to discuss the steps that might be taken to enlist the sympathy and co-operation of the Indians in war effort. The invitees included members belonging to the scheduled castes. According to Ambedkar, Vallabhbhai did not at all relish the idea that the Viceroy should have invited such a crowd of mean men—Ghanchis (oil-pressers), Mochis (cobblers) and the rest. In his malicious and stinging words, Ambedkar reveals, Vallabhbhai Patel referred only to Ghanchis and Mochis; his language was expressive of the general contempt in which he held the servile classes of his country.

The spate of tirades against the Congress and its leaders does not end here. Focusing his eyes on Nehru, on whom the attack is worse still, Ambedkar again makes some disparaging statements and disproves that Nehru was non-communal. Facts, he avows, did not justify the reputation he carried. Nehru was not at all secular, according to Ambedkar's definition of such a person. "A person cannot be called secular," we are told, "if he, when his father dies, performs the religious ceremonies prescribed by orthodox Hinduism at the hands of Brahmin priests on the banks of the river Ganges as Pandit Jawaharlal did when his father died in 1931....Pandit Nehru is very conscious of the fact that he is a Brahmin....More disturbing is the fact that in the United Provinces from which he hails and over which he exercises complete authority the ministers in the cabinet of the province were all Brahmins."<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from what has been said above and from his writings and speeches that Ambedkar was not the man to propitiate anyone—too upright, though he had his friends and disciples

who admired him for the sincere and disinterested man he was. Those nearest to him have a story which brings home to us that, under the jurisprudential dignity, there was more Buddhist compassion, *Kuruna*, than which no virtue is more humane. Even his critics are heard admitting that underneath the barrister's and constitutionist's rigorous application of principles personal kindness was discernible. His outspokenness created dangerous enemies who could hit back—some addicts of slavery, for example, among the backwards, for whom Ambedkar was battling, far from giving him support, flagrantly backed up the Congress and Gandhi by their hue and cry, mobbing and hissing Ambedkar in the conferences and meetings.

Ambedkar was a nonconformist, hostile to the Establishment, not a stickler for adhering to the laws of the so-called ancient seers. Dedication to duty and to the well-being of the depressed classes was his summum bonum. A distinguished scholar and a most able brain, he was always overworked and had no relaxation. There was certainly a class-interest in his dislike of the Congress and its leaders: he could not bear that an organization claiming to represent all the numerous classes should ignore the uplift of the untouchables just as most of the caste leaders in the Congress could not bear that someone born so far beneath them should demand equality and power and place above them. One or two of them expressed precisely this attitude. For his part Ambedkar was courageously determined to expose the Hindu foolery and to demolish the age-old idols of society and religion, the idols of the market-place, and such idols as Patel and Nehru, whom he represents as two of the most caste-obsessed men of contemporary Indian history, though his own dedication to the cause of the marginalised backward classes bordered literally on a sort of fixation. He was surely a committed man of great courage and resolution and, being most assured within himself that he proposed no end in his actions or writings other than what was in the interest of the depressed classes, he never lost sight of his goal or of the best ways to his ends. He thought, apparently, that Hinduism was responsible for all the social evils then rampant in the country, that the endogamous caste system which had retrogressively downgraded the śūdras, had weakened the social and political fabric of the country, and that

in order to shake off its fetters, it must annihilate the enslaving system. As there was no possibility of his attaining success in the aggressive role he wished to play, he, a combative untouchable, so bellicose throughout his life, turned toward Buddhism, the seeds of which were already sown in his early youth by *Life of Gautama Buddha*, a book presented to him by its author, K.A. Keluskar.

We should say that he ceased to care enough about his religion when he had the searing experience of having been driven out by the cartman and when the schoolboys did not allow him to touch the blackboard. Never healed by the apparently happy interludes later, he recalled so poignantly every detail of his early life, the look of the peon and of the diwan, the behaviour of his colleagues, his protests against the meanness and cruelty and hypocrisy of the caste Hindus, etc., etc. All these are touchingly alive in the pages of his writings. The soil—and the soul are in the following riddles of the śūdra :

“The Shudras are alleged to be non-Aryans, hostile to the Aryans, whom the Aryans are said to have conquered and made slaves. How is it then that the rishis of the Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda should wish glory to the Shudras and express a desire to be in favour of the Shudras?

“The Shudras are said not to have the right to study the Vedas. How is it then that Sudas, a Shudra, was the composer of the hymns of the Rig-Veda?

“The Shudras are said to have no right to perform sacrifices. How is it that Sudas performed the Ashva-Medha sacrifice? Why does the Satapatha Brahmana treat the Shudra as a sacrificer and give the formula of addressing him?

“The Shudras are said not to have the right to Upanayana. If this was so from the very beginning, why should there be a controversy about it? Why should Badari and the Samskara Ganapati say that he has a right to Upanayana?

“The Shudra is not permitted to accumulate property. How is it that the Maitrayani and Kathaka Samhitas speak of the Shudras being rich and wealthy?

“The Shudra is said to be unfit to become an officer of the

State. How is it then that the *Mahabharata* speaks of Shudras being ministers to kings?

“The performance of Upanayana of the Shudra, his learning to read the Vedas, his performing the sacrifices, whether they were of any value to the Shudra or not, were certainly occasions of benefit to the Brahmins in as much as it is the Brahmins who had the monopoly of officiating at ceremonies and of teaching the Vedas. It is the Brahmins who stood to earn large fees by allowing the Shudra the right to Upanayana, the performance of sacrifices and the reading of the Vedas. Why were the Brahmins so determined to deny these concessions to the Shudras, when granting them would have done no harm and would have increased their own earnings?

“Even if the Shudra had no right to Upanayana, sacrifices and Vedas, it was open to the Brahmins to concede him these rights. Why were these questions not left to the free will of the individual Brahmins? Why were penalties imposed upon a Brahmin if he did any of these prohibited acts?”<sup>5</sup>

All this is important and must therefore be borne in mind. But no less important is the paradox that confronts us in the character of Ambedkar. It is that he—a demolisher of Hinduism and its entrenched caste system, with an intense response to a concept of equality—should have set such little store by the religion and behaviour of his parents. He inveighs against Hinduism, its śāstras and its codes: he even deplores the Vedas, the laws of Manu. He never expresses regret for wishing to destroy Hinduism, the smashing of the caste system, the dispersal of everything sacred to his parents’ religion, the tearing up of the sacred books, the breach of the long, religious tradition. It seems inexplicable that such a son, so devoted to his devout parents, can have preferred the way of the Buddhist. We can only put it down to his reaction. In his case, the child is *not* father of the man. His father, we are told, read and recited to his children the great national epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, ‘the two unfailing sources of divine inspiration.’ Ramji Sakpal is described as one of those pious men who also sang spiritual songs from the Marathi saint-poets like Moropant, Mukteshwar and Tukaram. Dhananjay Keer adds that “constant recitals, recita-

tions and expositions of these songs helped develop a taste in his children, and provided them with a certain toning and command of the language in their early age." It is from the same biographer that we learn that the children joined in their father's devotions and that the sweet devotional lyrics and spiritual hymns of devotion flowed from Ramji's mouth like water from a fountain.

One of the traits Bhim had developed in his early youth was avidity for book-learning. He must therefore have read the book on the life of the Buddha and realized that his views squared with those enshrined in Buddhist scriptures. Buddhism was not casteist, nor was it a religion in the sense in which this word is commonly understood, for it is not a system of faith and worship owing allegiance to a supernatural being. It does not demand blind faith from its adherents. As Narada Thera has pointed out, "Here mere belief is dethroned and is substituted by confidence based on knowledge, which, in Pāli, is known as *Saddhā*. The confidence placed by a follower on the Buddha is like that of a sick person in a noted physician, or a student in his teacher. A Buddhist seeks refuge in the Buddha because it was He who discovered the Path of Deliverance."<sup>6</sup> A Buddhist is advised not to seek refuge in the Buddha with the hope that he will be granted deliverance by the Buddha's personal purification. While the brāhmaṇas and their gods and goddesses give such guarantees, the Buddha does not. Ambedkar appreciated such a pragmatic attitude, especially when it is affirmed that it is not within the power of the Buddha to wash away the impurities of others.

The moment Ambedkar forsook Hinduism he was liberated from the centuries of slavery in which his ancestors lay deeply embroiled. Though he hated the word brāhmaṇa and all the evil it stood for, he at once became a brāhmaṇa! The battle was over with this conversion! For Buddhism really cares not a fig about untouchability or about status. There are two very significant concepts which must have weighed heavily with Ambedkar. One is that one can neither purify nor defile another. The brāhmaṇas and the śāstras had been repeating, parrot-fashion, that they could purify and that the untouchables could defile. The Buddha, as teacher, instructed his followers that they themselves were directly responsible for their purification. Ambedkar noticed that, although a Buddhist sought refuge in the Buddha,

he did not make any self-surrender. Nor did a Buddhist sacrifice his freedom of thought by becoming a follower of the Buddha. What was most enrapturing to the man battling for freedom was the belief that a Buddhist could exercise his own free will and develop his knowledge even to the extent of becoming a Buddha himself. Ambedkar noticed that Hinduism stood for a complete negation of his most cherished ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity, that it never offered a person any chance to become a brāhmaṇa if he was born a śūdra. There was a religion (and not a religion) which he could embrace if only to shed his untouchability, if not to become a brāhmaṇa. But Buddhism did convert him into a brāhmaṇa sans brāhmaṇism. The twentysixth chapter of *The Dhammapada* defines a brāhmaṇa as one who is fearless and unshackled. Since Ambedkar had 'obtained knowledge' all bonds had vanished from him. Buddhism set little store by caste or by birth to determine a man's worth. A Buddhist is a Buddhist not by birth or heredity. One does not inherit one's religion, but one becomes a Buddhist by adhering to its cardinal canons and teachings. The following instruction of the Dhammapada are relevant to this context:

388. Because a man is rid of evil, therefore he is called Brāhmaṇa; because he walks quietly, therefore he is called Samana; because he has sent away his own impurities, therefore he is called Pravrajita (Pabbajita, a pilgrim).
393. A man does not become a Brāhmaṇa by his platted hair, by his family, or by birth; in whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brāhmaṇa.
394. What is the use of platted hair, O fool! What of the raiment of goat-skins? Within thee there is ravaging, but the outside thou makest clean.
396. I do not call a man a Brāhmaṇa because of his origin or of his mother. He is indeed arrogant, and he is wealthy: but the poor, who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa.
400. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who is free from anger, dutiful, virtuous, without appetites, who is subdued, and has received his last body.

- 403. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa whose knowledge is deep, who possesses wisdom, who knows the right way and the wrong, and has attained the highest end.
- 405. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who without hurting any creatures, whether feeble or strong, does not kill nor cause slaughter.
- 406. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who is tolerant with the intolerant, mild with the violent, and free from greed among the greedy.
- 407. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa from whom anger and hatred, pride and hypocrisy have dropped like a mustard seed from the point of a needle.
- 408. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who utters true speech, instructive and free from harshness, so that he offend no one.
- 409. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who takes nothing in the world that is not given him, be it long or short, small or large, good or bad.
- 411. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who has no interests, and when he has understood (the truth), does not say How, how? and who has reached the depth of the Immortal.
- 414. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who has traversed this miry road, the impassable world, difficult to pass, and its vanity, who has gone through, and reached the other shore, is thoughtful, steadfast, free from doubts, free from attachment, and content.
- 417. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who, after leaving all bondage to men, has risen above all bondage to the gods, and is free from all and every bondage.
- 421. Him I call indeed a Brāhmaṇa who calls nothing his own, whether it be before, behind, or between, who is poor, and free from the love of the world.

Ambedkar was a brāhmaṇa by the same token, but the brāhmaṇas of the Hindu faith were not brāhmaṇas at all. Brāhmaṇism was grounded on the belief that just as at a man's death there are heirs to his wealth, so are there heirs to his merit. Buddhism on the other hand admits of no such absurdity, for, according to *The Buddha-Charita* of Aśvaghoṣa, "At a man's

death there are doubtless heirs to his wealth; but heirs to his merit are hard to find on the earth or exist not at all." Much of the evil that bedevilled Hinduism was due to the monstrous ignorance of its so-called learned adherents. Ambedkar, like Áśvaghosa, had come to realize that ignorance is the root of the great trunk of pain and that therefore it is to be stopped by those who seek liberation. "So having determined the all-knowing Bodhisattva the illuminated one knew all as it really was." The brāhmaṇas lived in a make-believe world divorced from all reality. Ambedkar therefore abandoned this world of Hinduism, for he would not accept anything on mere hearsay thinking that thus have we heard it from a long time. To the seekers of truth the Buddha had said: Do not accept anything by mere tradition (i.e., thinking that it has thus been handed down through many generations). Do not accept anything on account of mere rumours (i.e., by believing what others say without any investigation). Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures.... Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable (i.e., thinking that as the speaker seems to be a good person his word should be accepted). Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic is respected by us (therefore it is right to accept his word).

Ambedkar derived inspiration from these words of the Buddha. His sceptical frame of mind did not accept anything on account of mere tradition and rumour. The brāhmaṇas on the other hand had rested their beliefs on hearsay, tradition and rumour. It was rumoured that the Hindus were forbidden to eat beef by their śāstras. Ambedkar shows that the Aryans of the Rīg Veda did kill cows for purposes of food and ate beef and that the essential element in *madhupāṛka* was flesh, particularly cow's flesh. One of his notable conclusions in *The Untouchables: Did the Hindus ... Beef?* is that the killing of the cow for the guest had come to be a practice to such an extent that the guest came to be called 'go-ghna', which means the killer of the cow. In a passage with some memorable statements on the subject of cow-killing and beef-eating by the Hindus, Ambedkar exposes the absurdity of the current notion and scotches the rumour that they did not eat beef.



In the region of motives one cannot be certain, but in Ambedkar's case one is on surer grounds and it appears that the keynote of his character was resistance to the Establishment, especially to fixed religious codes and dogmas—no wonder Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer gave him another name, Mahar Manu and in another place called him a wrestler 'like a Bhima'—probably inflamed and set on edge by a sense of caste inferiority, untouchability, humiliation, which he was determined to suppress, and certainly over-compensated. He always over reacted, a psychologist would say: and perceptive readers have wondered whether Ambedkar was emotionally honest with himself. His writings and his speeches, which never baffled those who knew him, followed from the position he early took up in his disquisitions on caste, which became a fixation. He became fixed, hardened and obdurate—with nothing of the adorable humility and flexibility of Mahatma Gandhi's nature.

Yet we must never forget—when so much in Ambedkar's intellectual make-up was utterly radical—that he was the architect of our constitution, a new Manu, a new law-giver. Here is the paradox; here is the bafflement! The arch-rejector of the ancient law-maker himself became a Manu. His intellectual position was to many orthodox people intolerable, even hateful; yet he was a man of transcendent genius, second to none.

## NOTES

1. K.L. Chanchreek and Saroj Prasad (eds.), *Social Justice and Political Safeguards for Depressed Classes* (New Delhi, 1991), pp. 85-86
2. *Op. cit.*, p. 55.
3. *W.S.*, Vol. 8, p. 143.
4. *W.S.*, Vol. 9, p. 462.
5. *W.S.*, Vol. 7, pp. 207-08.
6. *Buddhism in a Nutshell* (Kandy, Ceylon, 1966), p. 13.



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